

# *Evaluation, Homework and Teacher Support*

Waldorf Journal Project #5

Full-color Edition



Compiled and  
edited by  
DAVID MITCHELL



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*Waldorf*  
PUBLICATIONS

We measure the success of schools not by the kinds of human beings they produce, but by whatever increases in reading scores they chalk up. We have allowed quantitative standards, so central to the adult economic system, to become the principal yardstick for definition of our children's worth.

– Kenneth Kenniston  
Professor of Human Development at MIT

*Printed with support from the Waldorf Curriculum Fund*

Published by:

Waldorf Publications at the  
Research Institute for Waldorf Education  
38 Main Street  
Chatham, NY 12037

*Waldorf Journal Project #5*

Title: *Evaluation, Homework and Teacher Support*

Full-color Edition

Editor: David Mitchell

Translators: Karin DiGiacomo, Nina Kuettel and Jon McAlice

Layout: Ann Erwin

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ISBN #978-1-936367-73-3

Gratitude is expressed to the editors of *Erziehungskunst* and *Das Goetheanum* for permissions granted to translate these essays.

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# Foreword

The Waldorf Journal Project, sponsored by the Waldorf Curriculum Fund, brings to English-speaking audiences translations of essays, magazines, and specialized studies from around the world. This fifth edition of translations is comprised of articles intended for personal and faculty study. The focus here is evaluation and testing. The final article is a moving article about a Swiss Waldorf teacher who works with war-ravaged children in a public school. The article by Heinz Zimmermann on “The Art of Conversation, Speaking and Silence” may seem out of context but it is of vital interest for us all and a great article for a faculty study.

We hope that this *Journal* will help teachers and others gain insight into the seeds of Waldorf education.

For those not interested in downloading the material, spiral bound copies are available from:

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The editor, David Mitchell, was interested in receiving your comments on the material for this publication during his lifetime. We at Waldorf Publications are interested, in the spirit of his limitless interest in research from the field and in the news, in hearing from you. We would also be interested in hearing what areas you would like to see represented in future *Journal* projects. If you know of specific articles that you would like to see translated, please contact Waldorf Publications.

– The Editorial Staff  
*Waldorf Journal Projects*





# The Quest for Wholeness in the Waldorf Curriculum

by Erhard Fücke

Translated by Karin DiGiacomo

With puberty starts a process which leads the adolescent more and more into aloneness. The human being stands alone, separated from the world, and faces it. This process allows the adolescent to see the world with new eyes – parents and teachers and most of all one's own self. One's own abilities are recognized but also – and with particular accuracy – the limits of one's abilities. Having to deal alone with these new experiences is a deeply painful fundamental experience. Without help one has to establish the personal relationship with the world and with human beings. There are no up-front guarantees. It remains to be seen if and how this endeavor succeeds.

In this time it is particularly important in the development of the curriculum to recognize a particular need determining the soul life of an adolescent: The quest for wholeness. What does that mean? First, this striving manifests in the youth's wish to experience the multitude of possible soul stirrings. On all levels the adolescent pushes for primary experience in all areas of life. He or she seeks out even extreme life experiences. But the quest for wholeness has yet another face. Thinking, feeling and willing are often in conflict with each other. Is there a balance possible between the different poles of soul life? How can it be achieved?

Polarized formative tendencies are already expressed in the physical being. The nerve-sense system is a very different instrument for the soul than the metabolic-muscular organization or the rhythmic system of the human being.<sup>1</sup> The activity of the soul is reflected differently in these three systems. Only with the aid of the nerve-sense organization, daytime consciousness is reached. It provides sense impressions, imagination and ideation. To put it precisely: the

results of thought activity are entering into consciousness in the form of image-like concepts.

Something very different happens if the soul seizes the rhythmic system. Then feelings, moods form the response to the experiences in the world. Both these world tonalities ring back into the soul, rendering their specific harmonies. One speaks of intellectuals engaging in activities of the head (nerve-sense) system; we know of ‘feeling types’ in whom all experiences elicit strong feeling reactions, who let ‘the heart speak.’ Frequently these different types clash in real life. The ‘intellectuals’ are critical of the indifference in the judgments of the ‘feeling types,’ the latter reproach the ‘cold intellect’ of the former. But one thing also becomes apparent: whenever the human being develops just one or the other of these three modes in an unbalanced way, a deficiency is engendered.

A third relational development arises when the soul seizes upon the metabolic-muscular system. Activity is sparked. With this activity of the will we impact the world creatively. It is a mystery how thoughts seize and direct the will and motivate it because the process of willing is outside of direct observation and thus of consciousness. Only the results of this process rise into consciousness. We are fully awake while forming thoughts, but we “sleep” when we activate our will and dream in the realm of feelings.

There is also the personality whose faculty of will is so strong that he does not hesitate to act where others would deliberate. That is why this type is often experienced as being brutal, since he does not take into consideration the soul experience of others.

Ideally, the human being should develop each of these three systems in a sound way, but also that they should be formed in harmony with each other. We know through life experience that a comprehensive and balanced development of the soul is difficult to achieve. Our life circumstances challenge us into manifold specializations, which in turn leave their marks in the forms of strong and often one-sided developments. We can avoid these consequences only if we strive consciously for life experiences that can counterbalance such one-sidedness.

## Hunger for balance

In school education already the curriculum itself gives us cues as to whether serious consideration is given to the soul's quest for wholeness. Are all three relational systems (i.e., thinking, willing, feeling) stimulated and properly attended to? Or is it apparent at first glance that the curriculum carries the stigma of the deplorable distinction between main and minor subjects? The so-called main subjects focus on the acquisition of knowledge; thinking is developed and cultivated through practicing ideation. The reason for such a division is simple and convincing: knowledge is needed and useful. We could counter polemically: and what about compassion and a well-tempered faculty to act – are those not needed and useful? A critical analysis of our times leads to the assessment: now more than ever! The widespread fanaticism currently tyrannizing the world shows, for example, traits of heartlessness and of an emotionally overstimulated will, i.e. a terrifying one-sidedness to human nature.

The observant examiner of the Waldorf curriculum finds that all three faculties – thinking, feeling and willing – are cultivated in a balanced way. The artistic subjects play an important role in this, as they cannot exist without cultivation of the feeling nature or without constant activity.

Behind the thoughtful and focused change in the different modalities of practice, another realization dawns: If I practice mastering and disciplining movement, i.e., the will aspect – for example, through eurythmy – I engender the hunger for the opposite soul faculty. In other words, if I want to stimulate the will to learn a mental subject, then I have to set the student the task of engaging in artistic and practical activity. Therefore there are in reality no main and minor subjects. Rudolf Steiner expresses this fact in an aphorism: The physics teacher is enlivened in his teaching by the eurythmy teacher.

Furthermore, in the intentional alternation of activities the 'I' is stimulated to be active in the full spectrum of soul life. The participation of the 'I' in the learning process intensifies if the quest for wholeness is taken into consideration. This may be thought to be of small importance, but in reality the harmonious relationship between the three faculties of the soul is the foundation of human education and of forming the human being. When we study the horrible cataclysms of the previous century such as the Holocaust or Hiroshima, we will come to realize that these events originated in thought activity in complete

disregard of compassion or morals. This kind of thinking coldly calculated the results of those actions with no qualms about perpetrating such inhuman horrors.

Today the three faculties of the soul are more than ever in danger of dissociation. Thinking is being dulled more and more into mere absorption of information, feeling becomes more and more subject-oriented, and willing is becoming more and more the servant of an unbridled egotism. With that the 'I' loses all sovereignty. All that which is essential to true education, the mutually permeating and enlivening three faculties with which the soul relates to the world and their focused use by the 'I,' atrophies.

### **Yielding and setting boundaries**

Another polarity of soul life is found in opening to the world, i.e., the interest in the world and the retreat into the inner self, into self-contemplation. These two poles are in need of balance as well. Neither the blindly active nor the excessively pensive person is desirable. The human being is in danger of getting lost in the world through one-sided yielding to its attractions. He is swept away by the torrent of external events, without using the power of his individuality to form these events. In extreme cases he becomes the victim of circumstances. If one is too focused on oneself, self-contemplation leads to becoming a prisoner to one's own sensibilities. Once again it is desirable to move between the poles. The more decisively the swings of the pendulum are set in motion by pedagogy, the stronger the 'I' can take hold of the soul life. Steiner describes this rhythm by citing an example from religious science instruction. This instruction aims at turning inwards, at quiet reflection. But hunger for this kind of reflection is only evoked when focused attention is directed at the outer world. Quiet reflection is not evoked by stern admonishments and certainly not by moral demands. The hunger for inward contemplation emerges when the outer life is approached enthusiastically – for example, by demonstrating how a steam engine works or by exploring the importance of commercial banks. That is what fosters openness for that inner reflection, which the religious studies instruction is designed to further. This is one reason why the curricula demand a link to practical life for all major subject classes. Mathematics, for example, should lead to talking about financial institutions and of accounting.

The topic for the sixth grade Geography classes is to talk about the earth as a whole system. The vegetation zones of our planet are to be understood in respect to the sun's position and movement. Elementary level astronomy shows how the earth reacts to cosmic forces. The relationships between the vegetation zones are a result of the movements of sun and earth. These movements give rise to distinctively different systems of agriculture, for example. The resources of the earth are also distributed in various ways across the regions of the earth. When I study the natural resources I also dwell on nature. Such explorations bring us to recognize the natural phenomena as the origin of various crafts and professions. Mining industry only develops where there are deposits of coal, salt, metals, clay or kaolin (porcelain clay), and mining these raw materials often determines the character of an entire region. The coal in the Ruhr area was used to smelt iron, which had to be brought in from afar. The processing of iron and its refinement into steel in turn attracted a whole range of crafts and industrial firms. Just think of the rolling mills and extrusion plants, the various metal forges, the new forms of architecture made possible through the use of iron and the manifold products from knives to industrial cranes. These products could not be 'used up' by the local population alone. So the numerous industries became the basis for trade which exported the end products into lands far away. The streams of commerce carrying raw materials and processed goods form a network covering the entire globe. They are part of the whole system earth. How interesting are these great streams of trade transporting oil, spices, wool or cotton, copper, coffee and so on. All these trade routes have their own, dramatic histories. They are facilitated by the streams of money, flowing in opposite directions. Such explorations allow us to gain true insights into practical life.

## **Understanding and changing the world**

The most important thing however is that we as human beings do not leave the earth in the same condition as we find it. People change the gifts of the earth. A new world of commerce springs up in close connection with the underlying natural resources and climates, and yet relatively independent of these factors as well. The human spirit creates this structure. Countless inventions have been made to produce commercial goods, starting with simple things, like the transformation of kaolin into porcelain, and ending with complicated space

technology. We must not only talk about the 'Natural World,' but also about the 'Human World.' This is the basis for the study of economics. In this class we talk about the deeds of the human spirit which have shaped the world. We also deal with the destiny of social currents which are dependent on the order of economic life.

Now back to the subject of religious instruction. The need for inner reflection grows in direct proportion to the student's being introduced to the world of economics, which always also engenders social questions. It soon becomes evident that the so-called social questions cannot be solved without employing 'objective models.' We should beware of providing this ethical answer; rather it should grow out of an exploration of the facts. Again we are faced with a paradox: the lively description and the reflection on that which we call the 'Human World' will stimulate the need for inner contemplation.

Caroline von Heydebrand, classroom teacher of the first Waldorf school, tells an elucidating story. In the middle of a presentation deep sighing was heard throughout the class. Questioned why they sighed, the students answered, "Oh, Dr. Heydebrand, if you would just tell us about the Zeppelin in just such a wonderful way!" Here we clearly see reflected the student's yearning for experiencing the world as a whole, for understanding the cultural history of mankind as a totality.

Here too Steiner urges us to take active hold of the issue and not stay stuck in contemplating it. Commercial orders, customer service problems, order cancellations, and so forth, must be expressed in precise, understandable written language so that such letters leave no doubt about what the writer intends. Writer as well as recipient must take clear facts for orientation; emotion and sensibilities must not interfere. Particular scenarios from social life are explored. This type of instruction should be complemented by elementary vocational instructions. In these classes we investigate and discuss the function and organization of production technology. Throughout the ages people have made use of technology without really understanding how it functions. This lack of partaking in the 'human world' undermines social understanding and awareness. Steiner clearly points to this fact: "The worst thing is to live in the world shaped by humans and yet not to care about that world. We can preempt such misdevelopment only by instructing children in the most important processes of

human life; such instruction must begin early in the last level of elementary school education, so that fifteen-, sixteen- year-old student will not graduate without such knowledge. Such instruction will give rise to yearning, to curiosity and to a thirst for knowledge, prompting the young person to further expand his or her knowledge of the world. Towards the end of school [meaning the last third of childhood] we should therefore employ the various subject areas in a holistic sense for the social education of the human being.”<sup>2</sup>

What intention does Steiner express here? At the moment when the light of consciousness projects its rays forward during the phase of pre-puberty (starting around the sixth grade), the exploration of the natural world should be complemented by social studies. The experience of the laws of nature now stands side by side with the understanding of how the human being shapes the world. The students should gain an experiential understanding of how the inventive human spirit uses the natural laws and how our social order develops hand in hand with this process. History as a subject offers the opportunity to awaken such understanding at this grade level by dealing with the age of industrialization and the connected social issues. But it is not the only opportunity – all other subjects must be dedicated to this goal as well. The impulse of letting economic and social viewpoints unfold in other subjects can fully expand only if the teacher increasingly experiences the soul’s quest for wholeness. The teacher is often a casualty of traditional methods of teaching, which do not offer economic and social sciences until the higher grades (high school). The traditional curriculum does not teach these subjects during the pivotal phase of pre-puberty, when dawns an awakening to the world of human creative energy and when it becomes necessary to begin to answer the students in their quest for wholeness. In this time the light of consciousness already casts ahead its rays, but the egotism accompanying puberty is not yet developed. Therefore this phase offers a unique opportunity to plant the seeds of a holistic world experience. This is a second reason why social education is especially needed in this phase of life, and taught in a comprehensive way and not through personal moral admonishments.

# ENDNOTES

1. We describe all body processes in the torso field as ‘metabolic’ (digestion, reproduction, etc.) and with ‘muscular’ the extremities (movement oriented system). The rhythmic system covers the respiratory-circulatory organization (lungs, heart, the entire chest area) and the nerve-sense system refers to all nerve processes (brain, the entire head area with its sensory organs). These three organizing systems have a close affinity to the three basic soul competencies: The metabolic-muscular system corresponds to willing, the rhythmic system to feeling, and the nerve-sense system to thinking (ideation).
2. Rudolf Steiner: *Erziehungskunst, Methodisch-Didaktisches*, 12. Vortrag (March 9, 1919), GA 294, S. 162 f., Dornach: 1990.

*About the author:* Erhard Fucke, born 1926, was a classroom and high school teacher at the Freie Waldorfschule Kassel until his retirement. He was involved in integrating professional education into the Waldorf school. For twelve years, he served as a consultant to South American and South African Waldorf schools. He wrote numerous publications on anthroposophical and pedagogical topics.



# What Wants to Emerge?

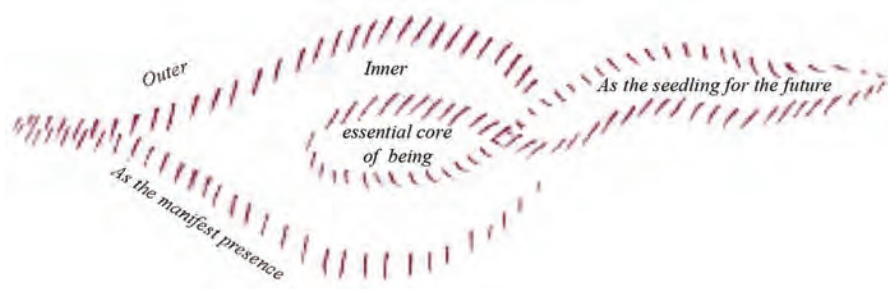
by Claus-Peter Röh

Translated by Karen DiGiacomo

Every once in a while a young person speaks up with a special interest or a hard-won, individual contribution that has emerged from his or her inner core, transcending the outer circumstances and routines of the class. This is a moving moment in the educational everyday life of a teacher. Such a 'pedagogic resonance' between outer stimuli and inner engagement often immediately enlivens the subject matter and intensifies the interactive dialogue. Also, when a child or adolescent is going through times of developmental crisis, it is often very important that the attending parents and teachers firmly focus their consciousness on the image of that student's inner, human personality core, in spite of all outer difficulties. If such an image is supported, all those involved can develop alternative perspectives in their search for a path that leads forward.

Rudolf Steiner describes the discrepancy between the outer appearance and the innermost core of a young person as follows: "No longer does the inner person fully express itself in the outer, and we can observe that first in a child. The child today often is something quite different from what it portrays to the outer world. We can even have extreme cases. To the world, children can look like the most impertinent urchins, and there is such a good core hidden in them that later they become most valuable human beings."<sup>1</sup>

These thoughts evoke the connection between the polarities Inside/Outside with the time coordinates Present/Future:



This connectedness of the poles brings up the question: Is it possible for me as an educator and teacher to become more and more aware of the inner essence of a child? This would allow me to tailor future instruction closer to the child's needs. Issues of karma and fate come up immediately: What does the young being bring into the manifest presence of his life, for example, in terms of physical constitution, tendencies or talents. Where does the direction, the innermost purpose of this individuality's development, really point? What wants to become, to emerge?

### **A first dawning of awareness in class**

It began with a main lesson in the second grade: As usual the 'Friday children' lined up in front of the blackboard to assume a geometric formation for the recitations. Between recitations they moved on this pattern, the one in the middle reciting. Now it is the turn of the student Daniel.

All of a sudden I notice a different quality of silence: Daniel stands there in complete stillness and fixes his eyes on a point on the floor. He waits patiently until the class is ready to give him their attention, and the resulting pause is filled with reverent silence. Now Daniel starts to speak with finely phrased words. While I listen in amazement, I become aware how this student's personality has succeeded in spellbinding his classmates nearly without effort and at first even without words! At the same time it is as if a veil were lifted from my eyes and I am struck by the realization that I was just allowed to gain a deep insight into the essence of this young being: Between Daniel and the class some inner-soul dynamic is forming which is clearly and distinctly rising up above the normal educational routine.

In this moment of astonished awareness, I experience a simultaneity of different levels, which is difficult to describe: along with the class I am deeply moved and so awestruck that all side-impressions are tuned out. At the same time I try in vain to understand it all, a subterranean rumbling of thought, I lose the usual inner grip in a sort of 'landslide.' At the same time I am certain of never before having fully, comprehensively, recognized this student and that something in me should and will change. Afterwards we resume the class activities, but in the background the experience continues to sting me.

## **Aftereffects: The 'matrix' of the entire picture changes**

As I later reviewed the class, the awareness of that moment immediately returned. I pictured that student again, and something came into motion: other, earlier experiences surfaced and wove into the impressions of the morning: There was the hike we did to the 'dwarf caves.' When the class was uncertain and in danger of splitting into separate groups during the excursion, David had stepped in and had thoughtfully and as a matter of course assumed responsibility for the few who had fallen behind. There was also the play celebrating the start of school for the next first grade. The participating students liked David playing the role of the guardian king of the realm. There were his questions, for example, concerning the life forces of the sun. There were moments of discouragement and of despair when something seemed unjust to him or out of balance, and the classmates had responded to him with compassion and caring.

These memories and others surfaced during my review and wove together with today's experiences into a new, still unfinished tapestry: a student personality entered our experience, greatly impacting his classmates in a very individual way. With deep appreciation and respect, the community responded to this force of a thoughtful, wide-ranging perspective of its social being, even though they had come together as a class only a year ago when they started school.

In the class session following it became apparent that the other students, too, had grasped the import of that moment of stillness before David's recitation. But when someone else purposely remained silent and waited, 'fixing' his gaze outwardly on the floor, the class immediately responded, "What are you waiting for? Get going!"

## **Interest and awareness**

I recognized that no one can quickly acquire this individual ability of spellbinding the entire group and touching them so deeply; obviously such a talent has been brought along into this life as the soul's gift in the innermost core of the young person. I noticed that I had a new interest in David and his classmates. Still moved by gratitude for this experience, I noticed a renewed attitude in me of expectation and joyful anticipation before the class session. Knowing that such an intense experience would probably not be repeated

I became eager for exploration and felt as if I were discovering a new, still unknown, country. My attention to the dialogue within the class changed. While listening, I became less focused on the content and the thoughts but more attentive to observing the inner attitude, the inner impulse from which the students spoke, to hearing the inner resonance that the dialogue evoked in the other students.

Since that first discovery started in the space between two recitations, I started to focus on the short spaces between other activities: How do the students get ready to begin writing or drawing? How do they shape the transitions and pauses between activities? On what is their inner process focusing? How does each individual deal with unexpected situations? By and by these 'small' things surfaced more distinctly in the daily reviews during the afternoon: facial expression, tone of voice, choice of language, the way they move. When I succeeded to bring my attention to these 'small things,' a new closeness emerged, full of dignity and fondness for the young beings. This in turn had an impact on my choice of learning topics and on how I prepared for recitations and scenes. This awareness actually shaped the way the morning classes went.

### **Tendency to focus on the extraordinary as an obstacle**

Just like a picture in memory fades over time, so also this first quest for a direct continuation of that experience quieted down after a while. Fundamental questions now came to the foreground: Did I correctly interpret and integrate the encounter with that inborn talent? Were there other realizations and conclusions to be drawn from this experience? Could a conversation with a trusted person perhaps yield more insights? In a later conversation of this sort I once gave in to a speculation who this personality, which so greatly impacted the class, may have been in a previous incarnation; this tentative curiosity immediately resulted in a distinctive alienation from the essence of the process: the daily encounters became more distanced, the 'correspondence' between the experiences in class and the inner review during the next lesson planning abated and changed. It appeared as if this tendency towards the mysterious-sensational in form of 'wanting to know just the past' showed characteristics of something dying, decaying. As a result of this experience, I tried to be even

more mindful of speaking about these matters with even greater respect for the dignity of the personality and adhering strictly to the experience itself. There is a surge of energy and dynamic force in an approach that is based on the interested, dignified human encounter and aims at further development.

As a teacher I am challenged into an inner re-orientation when I recognize that encounters and processes occur among the students that are often only recognized after they have started or already happened. When I want to get an understanding of the Essential, I must be first the listener, the learner. That connects me more deeply to the stream of development and I realize from a new perspective that I have my own part to play in this development: The pedagogic challenges, which I encounter, obviously have something to do with me. In my experience, the path to this re-orientation was not a linear one, but consisted of shuttling between insecurity, powerlessness and new heartening. I was deeply moved when I then realized that the search for the individual essence of each student's personality really requires a completely different approach each time. In one case it was the way a student painted, another time it was revealed in the individual-poignant writing style of an essay; in a third case the clue was the unshakable honesty of a student in each and every thought, essay or conversation. My inner inquisitiveness and awareness and my openness to being deeply touched determine whether I – to stay with the image – am allowed to join the students in the 'boat' of their development, whether I will find a place in there to steer the boat towards the future or whether I will only observe the journey from the shore.

#### ENDNOTE

1. Rudolf Steiner, *The Spiritual Underpinnings of the Outer World*, GA 177, Dornach: 1999, lecture given on October 8, 1917, page 107.

*About the author:* Claus-Peter Röh, born in 1955, has worked since 1983 as a class teacher also teaching religion and music, at the Free Waldorf School in Flensburg. He is married and has two children.

# Evaluating, Judging, Testing and Learning

by Robert Thomas

Translated by John O'Brien

For as long as schools have existed – in the sense that we understand them today – one of the teacher's main tasks has been to observe, evaluate, judge and classify the work of their students. Here the problems of the pedagogical task begins. Children and young people want to learn on their own initiative, and in a very individual manner. To test and provide documentary evidence of this is very complex. One thing experienced educators can agree upon: the learning process can be encouraged by pedagogy but can never be caused or steered by it. It is the child him/herself who learns. This can be said more radically: the only thing we humans can really do on our own is learn.

It is, therefore, important in school to raise the question of what the judgment and evaluation of the learning process should look like. Should learning processes be individual or merely reduced to a measurable cognitive level? We know that large school systems, mostly those of the state, are dependent on productivity and economic success and have developed standardized measuring systems so as to be able to provide an 'objective' evaluation of school work. As comparability with other measurement systems is demanded, the present age of globalization demands a formalized method of analysis and an international evaluation system.<sup>1</sup> Here and there, however, with the introduction of portfolios and personal full-year projects, movement in the direction of individualized evaluation has begun to appear.

## The interface of the Waldorf school

The Waldorf school has been confronted with these problems from the very beginning, especially with regard to pupils who leave the school in order to

continue their education at other schools. Before the final school-leaving, the continuous overall evaluation of the pupil is sufficiently adequate (certificates, intermediate reports, parents' meetings, quarterly assemblies, individual discussions, etc.). It is, of course, expected that the school-leavers must be able to provide documentary evidence of their school work/level of knowledge/competence in order to continue their education. An important interface in this connection is the end of pupil's time at school, upon finishing the twelfth grade. If the Waldorf school-leavers are not to be discriminated against and permanently put at a disadvantage, adaptations to the different national educational systems are indispensable. It is also advisable to regulate access to institutions of further education to the benefit of the pupils, as long as due reforms of European universities have not yet created new possibilities<sup>2</sup> or have regulated the equivalence of a recognized Waldorf school-leaving certificate. Apart from this, however, the question of the assessment of the pupil's real and individual school work remains open, and this question preoccupies not only the young people and their teachers but also the European community at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup> Not only what has been learned is important but also how well it is retained.

### **How does the student learn?**

How a pupil learns also depends in part on the quality of the instruction. According to Rudolf Steiner, one of the golden rules of education is the teacher's daily reflecting backwards at what took place during that day's lesson. The teacher's observation is sharpened by his/her basic exercise of separating the important from the unimportant, the essential from the inessential. This is how a sense for quality and its optimization is created. In this way the teacher truly grasps how his students have taken up, understood, and processed the material of the instruction. The teacher himself begins a learning process in the evaluation of the student's school work and receives in practice a concrete feeling for the reliability of the learning student and what he can expect from the student. This result of reflection is decisive for continuous evaluation. In the science of education, reflecting back is merely described as a form of 'taking stock.' So as to be able to measure the quality of the instruction objectively, a number of criteria have been carefully worked out: the learning climate, the effectiveness of what happens during the lesson, and the significance of the overall lesson plan. From



this it can be deduced what is necessary in order to satisfy the student's will to learn.

Empirical studies have shown how fundamentally different each student's learning process is at different age levels. Moreover, pupils learn in quite different manners: some learn step by step, building up logically on what has already been treated – and all intermediate steps are decisive – while others learn intuitively; they have an overview of the subject and at the same time grasp its meaning. The teacher encounters these contrasting learning processes every day. There are even some pupils who change from one type of learning process to the other.

### **How do we evaluate the results?**

Do we evaluate by the measurable facts and/or is it the student's 'soft facts' such as personal application, how he/she has come to the results and how he/she has arranged the facts in the context, his/her interest in these facts, the permanence of what has been learned? It is more rational to judge formally only facts – only testing for knowledge (past-oriented evaluation). Steiner explains the difference between knowledge and understanding and points out that the growing person needs understanding if he is to learn from life. "Life itself, however, is the greatest school, and one leaves school rightly only when he brings out of it the ability to learn from life his whole life long." 4

### **How does the teacher teach?**

Empirical studies have analyzed the possible forms of instruction and evaluated their efficiency. Learning techniques are instruments of a scientific character which focus on measurable results and which can and are intended to classify them.<sup>5</sup> These didactic means are stimulating as long as they do not end up in a system and become routine. The pupil is always in a unique learning situation and needs the full didactic availability and openness of his teacher. The uniqueness of his developing willingness to learn demands to be recognized, if it is to be able to grow. This anthropological law is one of the new social requirements of the present age.

Fluctuations in learning are dependent on age and character, and here imponderables often play a role. Not only is an individualized dialectic necessary, but a grasp of the 'here-and-now' of the learning process can work wonders.



In order to characterize this better, I would like to make an analogy to modern aesthetics.

Why has it become so demanding and difficult today to evaluate a work of art? In his book on the philosophy of art of the 1930s, Walter Benjamin radically challenged the great systems of aesthetic evaluation (of Plato, Kant, Hegel, Schiller, Lukacs, Heidegger). He found that numerous reproductions of works of art modify the original, that is, the relation of the viewer to the work is affected by its reproducibility.<sup>6</sup> The category of a work of art's authenticity, i.e., that of the original embedded in the context of its tradition, is destroyed by its technical reproduction. Benjamin sought a new binding character between the work and the viewer. He wanted to apprehend the uniqueness of the object anew and to make the confrontation become essential, so that the criticism of the work of art would serve less to evaluate it than to complete it.

This understanding of art is a true help in observing and evaluating the 'judgment' of the student's work: by means of these clear acts of consciousness, the teacher contributes to encouraging the pupil and strengthening his will to learn (i.e., the completion of a work of art, according to Benjamin). The teacher truly teaches by perceiving the pupil's willingness to learn and supporting it through evaluation. The work of the evaluator is now an objective/subjective reflection of a relationship and a challenge for the pupil.

### **A new possible form of evaluation and judgment**

When one reflects on the foregoing and allows it to take effect on oneself, it is possible that something will now become clear: in school as well as in life, there is a 'what,' a 'how' and a 'who.' The 'what' consists of measurable facts, the 'how' contains a relationship between the learner and the teacher, and the 'who' indicates something that is unique, not immediately tangible but rather future-oriented, a kind of message from the future.

In order to make this dimension of evaluation and testing bear fruit in practice, I have attempted to introduce a new perspective of evaluating a pupil's work in the classroom. Based on a concrete example, I would like to show how the evaluation of the work in an architecture epoch in a twelfth grade high school main lesson looks and how the individual judgment of the work and subject knowledge of the pupils is considered. The theme of the main lesson is

actually only of secondary importance; the method of this evaluation is certainly transferable to all other school subjects. The following report is based on several main lessons.

When eighteen-year-olds – who are in the process of presenting themselves through their full-year projects – encounter a subject, it is indispensable to reach agreement on certain points from the beginning. What is the purpose/goal of the main lesson? How do we reach it? Why is it important? How do we observe that the agreement between the teacher and the pupil is valid and binding? Because after all, in the twelfth grade the pupils have long been jointly responsible for the design and primary focus of a main lesson within the framework of their limited comprehension and competence.

Now, in order to be able to document authentic information concerning an individual's work at the end of the epoch, the manner of procedure is harmonized with the class. The pupils independently plan the written and documentary elaboration of the material; however, the deadline for handing in the project is fixed. Each one must give a fifteen-minute talk before the class, followed by a ten-minute discussion period, on two structures of modern architecture, with comments on slides of these works from the standpoint of a specialist (architectural statics, style, and so forth), using any desired auxiliaries such as slides or laser pens, and including a brief biographical sketch of the architect. Following this, the other pupils and the teacher can ask questions. After the discussion an evaluation takes place.

First the pupil evaluates his own performance (from the standpoint of subject, content, communication). Then the class reacts to the presentation and comments on its strengths and weaknesses. In the third step the teacher gives his/her evaluation. Self-evaluation and evaluation by others are aspects of reality: the pupil, the class, and the teacher. Again and again one hears impressive statements such as: "I succeeded in communicating something, but if I had looked at Structure X more closely, I could have answered such- and-such question more clearly," or: "I see that I have to speak more slowly, if I want to present something more clearly," or again: "If I had to do it over again, I would do it differently."

A wealth of promising resolutions regarding self-knowledge come into view. What happens when the class comments on a pupil's work together with the

teacher? Through the active interest and attention on the part of everyone, there arises a clear feeling for the work of the student involved. Most statements are considerate but unsparing. The class learns to speak and criticize in such a way that the statement becomes acceptable, constructive, and fruitful. In conclusion the teacher gives an evaluation based on his experience and his overall view of the student's work, and he attempts to characterize clearly the student's competence in the subject. The future, the present, and the past are drawn together in the evaluation.

What results from this? Three statements that are of equal value and worth. It is not the expert/teacher (from yesterday) who evaluates alone, rather the individual's work is consciously apprehended in its social context by everyone involved. For years it has been shown that this manner of testing contains more value, differentiation and truth content than the traditional, reductive standard method of evaluation. Testing and evaluation are implemented in the social realm; out of this form of evaluation the cultural climate can develop which was spoken of in the 1966 UNESCO report: *Learning Ability: Our Hidden Wealth*.<sup>7</sup> The individual, the world, and the student's peers meet each other in a real way, without barriers or standards, and for this reason, they come closer together. This creates reality.

#### ENDNOTES

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# The Role of Evaluation and Examinations in Waldorf Education

within Different Age Groups

by Martyn Rawson

Translated by John O'Brien

*This working paper deals with the question of examinations, but first it is necessary to place the subject in the wider context of pedagogical examination.*

## What is evaluation?

Evaluation means knowing, establishing, making visible, comparing and assessing the value of something. These are quite different activities. Knowing means seeking the essential quality of something in its context. Establishing the value of something requires an analysis that identifies the relevant aspects since not all aspects are equally important even when we try to look at the situation in a holistic way. We set priorities in the form of value-systems. Assessing implies weighing the value of something, comparing it with other similar objects and at the same time valuing it, that is, appreciating its unique qualities. In order to know the essence of something we must approach it with well-intentioned, loving interest. Well-meaning interest is the starting point of any real evaluation.

Evaluation also has to do with testing. We are constantly being tested by life. In all social situations we are constantly being tested and questioned. In the past each culture has had its own form of ritual testing. The essential phases of life were marked by various forms of trial. At puberty and later on reaching adult maturity, young people were admitted into their society as full adults by way of ceremonies and initiations trials. Today we have mostly only bourgeois remainders of these rituals. They have been replaced by school exams. Yet the

need that young people have to be challenged and tested is not met through forms. Rather they seek their trials through all manner of risk-taking activities.

## **Waldorf education and exams**

Waldorf education has largely distanced itself from the general examination culture (at least in theory). Waldorf schools are usually cited as classic examples of schools without grades and testing. “Waldorf schools counter this culture of selection with that of support,” wrote Christoph Lindenberg in his best seller<sup>1</sup> on Waldorf education. In public exams the key element is that of selection and this assumes competition. Education becomes competitive. Fear and ambition are effective means of educating but in Waldorf these elements are countered through cooperation and interest. Instead of competition we cultivate cooperation, instead of selection we have inclusiveness.

## **Is one allowed to evaluate in the Waldorf school?**

This inclusive approach has sometimes led to a total ban on evaluation and thus the baby is thrown out with the grubby bathwater. Paradoxically this attitude has often lived side by (uncomfortable) side with an ambivalent attitude to public exams. One would quite like to abolish them or seek alternatives, yet there is considerable willingness to serve this bourgeois symbol (“at least it shows that our pupils are normal”). It is perhaps not as crass as the German magazine *Spiegel* recently reported, “Already in the first class the parents fear that their children won’t pass their exams,” though this attitude is not unknown.

In uncertain times, in which all forms of social security are being progressively withdrawn or undermined, the pressure from parents and pupils to quickly and efficiently gain the security of a passport to the next round of qualifications grows apace. Waldorf principles are one thing but good grades in the exams have to be gained, whatever the pedagogical cost. Pedagogically the worst case scenario is when a Waldorf school has no evaluation culture other than the state exams. These exams generate such insecurity that they work to undermine the education right down into the elementary school, years before any heed need be paid to the actual requirements of the exams. Their psychological effect is much greater than their actual relevance. Where one is used to working with meaningful forms of pedagogical evaluation throughout

the school in age appropriate ways, external exams play a much less significant role in the minds of pupils, parents, and even teachers.

Waldorf education has always had many formal and informal forms of evaluation such as written school reports, child studies, diagnostic studies (such school readiness studies, the second grade class study, etc.), many forms of assessment (class tests, evaluation of main lesson books, dictations and vocabulary or mathematics tests within lessons) and many other informal ways in which pupils receive feedback on their work and development.

### **Evaluation means having aims**

When we evaluate we test whether something is right, whether it is ripe and to what extent it meets our expectation. That means we evaluate according to certain criteria. In the process of evaluation a judgment is formed in relation to aims that are set. A central question for Waldorf education is: what are our pedagogical aims for the various ages and subjects? Secondly, we have to ask ourselves continuously, how can we support each child's development?

However, we are concerned with more than merely assessing or making learning outcomes visible. Our task is at the same time to strengthen the learning process through evaluation. It is part of our education task to value the learning process itself as an outcome. Educational evaluation cannot only make many-sided achievements and the development of abilities visible and if necessary provable, but can also support the learning process itself. It is not just a question of demonstrating subject competence but also a whole raft of personal and interpersonal abilities, as well as problem solving competence, transfer skills, moral abilities and creativity – qualities that can actually only be demonstrated in real life situations.

In summary we can say that evaluation can:

- compare and assess abilities, competencies, achievements in relation to standards, or self-determined goals
- be a diagnostic tool in accompanying the learning process
- in the form of self-evaluation, enable the development of self- knowledge and learning competence.

## Learning and testing in context

One must not lose sight of the relationship between learning and testing. What does this mean for evaluation? Does it help me to understand the pupils better? It is worth bearing the following basic principles in mind in order to have a basis for our practice. When I examine the child's learning and development, they reveal certain stages and transitions which the child has to go through in the process of acquiring competencies.

## Key competencies, standards and Waldorf education

Today we are aware that the central aim of education is to facilitate the acquisition of competencies the individual needs for life-long learning. Many forms of competence are described from basic skills such as reading and writing and basic mathematical abilities to social skills, inter-cultural competence, the ability to manage situations, dealing with information, learning skills, citizenship and personal competencies include moral and ethical behavior. In Waldorf education we tend to speak of skills and abilities, but no one would deny that all these competencies are irrelevant (even if the terminology is unsympathetic).

A colleague, Klaus-Michael Maurer from Hamburg and I (as part of a research project into new forms of examinations within Waldorf schools) recently compared the Waldorf approach to understanding the learning process and the requirements of the state in terms of key competencies or standards. These standards are usually presented in three basic stages that correspond to certain steps in learning: level A = reproduction, level B = application, level C = transfer (which implies the ability to apply skills acquired in one field to another). Applied to the whole of Waldorf education we can see that level A generally corresponds to the learning mode of the lower school, level B to the middle school (including Class 9) and level C to the upper classes (11 and 12), though it is clear that though the phases are successive, they are integrated. Therefore the upper school approach could be described as A+B+C. The levels of reproduction and application are almost always either explicitly or implicitly present in level C, transfer.

If we recognize the primary learning mode in the lower school as corresponding with level A reproduction (which naturally is not as mechanical as it sounds and includes imitation but also following what the teacher

instructs), then it becomes clear that the primary skill required is the ability to perceive, to take in, to be receptive and open and that these qualities depend on the child being able to direct, focus and maintain her attention. In terms of the pedagogical observation, it is interesting to note when a primary ability (or, more likely, abilities) crystallizes into a specific skill (e.g., motor control, hand-eye coordination, balance, ability to form mental pictures, focused listening, etc.), it provides a platform for the acquisition of the skills we know as reading and writing. Equally important is the observation of how and when skills transform into complex abilities or competencies at the next higher level (e.g., basic writing ability leads to the ability to compose original pieces of writing or reading skills enable the learner to work with literature). There are many stages of learning to observe, each one of which can be evaluated and diagnosed and, where necessary, supported.

The following table summarizes the relations between the different concepts described above. We have added to the scheme the concepts used by Dr. Peter Loebell to describe basic learning phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Level	Loebell	Steiner, <i>Study of Man</i> lecture 9	Ability/competence	State educational standards
A	Awareness/noticing	Conclusion (willing)	Awareness, powers of perception	Reproduction
B	Commitment	Judgment (feeling)	Ability to apply what one has learned	Application
C	Evidential experience	Concept (thinking)	Ability to abstract	Transfer

**Evaluation in the various age groups**

When looking at the different age groups we need to bear in mind the two primary functions of evaluation:

- Diagnostic monitoring of development
- Evaluation (including self-evaluation) of attainment



To the typical diagnostic evaluations belong:

### **School admissions study**

The study carried out to determine whether a child is ready to make the transition from kindergarten to school is an important evaluation. Here a series of criteria have been identified to determine whether a child is ready for school. Essentially these criteria require the observation and judgment of the extent to which the formative forces have become emancipated from their primary function of forming organic and rhythmic processes and have become available for the forming of mental images and structuring inner experience, which are the preconditions for formal learning.

The term ‘school readiness’ is no longer much in use outside of Waldorf education and has been replaced by the concept of learning competence or willingness. One judges whether a child is willing and able to start formal learning, regardless of whether the inner processes or maturation are complete or not. We know from experience that if we apply the same criteria to judging school readiness today as were used twenty years ago, we would find that most children of school age are not as ready as they were.<sup>3</sup>

This recognition has led to many endeavors both within the kindergarten and in the lower school (e.g., the moving classroom or Bochum Model) to restructure the child’s learning experiences to enhance readiness by nurturing the lower senses. Here is not the place to discuss such developments. However it is important to note that if there is a marked dissociation of the maturation processes, then we need a detailed diagnostic study of the developmental process and the monitoring of children in the transition from kindergarten to school to know what is really happening and what children’s needs really are. Furthermore, if new concepts of structuring this transition are implemented, we need clear criteria to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of supporting children’s development which can thus provide a basis for evaluation.

### **The Second Grade study**

Developed by the Dutch Waldorf schools advisory service, this diagnostic test is widely used to monitor and assess children’s development and identify needs for specific learning support. A series of observations are made regarding

unresolved reflexes, bodily coordination (including eye-hand-foot dominance), fine and gross motor skills, proprioception (balance, sense of movement, etc.), symmetry, sense of time, language competence, numerical skills, and so forth.

Some schools such as Michael Hall School in the UK carry out class screening throughout the lower school to identify children with learning support needs, and individual education plans are drawn up with strategies and review schedules. That does not mean every problem gets solved, but it does mean that we generally know that the problem has not been solved!

## **Child studies**

Child studies are a frequent activity within the teachers' meetings for all age groups. Individual children are the focus for closer study and discussion. Such child studies are usually structured around focused observations, for which there are many criteria reflecting various theoretical perspectives, including:

- Characterological typology based on the anthroposophical understanding of the developing human being (e.g., gender, temperament, planetary types, large and small headedness, cosmic and earthly polarities, constitutional types)
- Various aspects of dyslexia
- Developmental phases and thresholds (e.g., Rubicon, puberty)
- Learning differences
- Social development and behavior
- Biographical aspects

Often these aspects are more implicit in the characterizations, though child studies can focus specifically on one or other aspects.

The aim of a child study is to gain as comprehensive a picture as possible of the child's being and development. Often the study goes a step further and identifies strategies to help and support the child. In many countries something along the lines of an individual education plan is drawn up involving teachers, therapists, school doctor and even occasionally parents to include diagnosis, therapy, and a timeframe for monitoring developments.

## Monitoring and testing

Monitoring means the regular documentation of observations made of the learning and developmental processes of pupils, for example, in areas such as reading and writing, in artistic work or in the development of social abilities. It may be relevant to record when and how a child achieved a certain level of competence, or when a child did something for the first time or indeed any other significant moments. Monitoring, and the judgment implicit in it – we do not and cannot record every thing – require that we have developmental milestones or thresholds in mind, expectations that tell us that children usually reach this stage of development around this time or in certain sequence.

Testing on the other hand requires that we construct a specific situation in order to test whether certain skills have been learned, e.g., through a vocabulary test or a written assignment under certain conditions. If monitoring is passive observation of that which unfolds, testing is active. Monitoring belongs to pedagogical support; testing is evaluation in the narrower sense. Class teachers are well advised to monitor and document the developmental stages through which the children in their care go.<sup>4</sup>

## School reports and developmental profiles

In the Waldorf school report, an attempt is made to formulate a picture of the child's being and to formulate future tasks or emphases. In theory the Waldorf report contains both diagnostic and evaluative elements. On the one hand a picture is given of the pupil's whole development and on the other, the student's attainments and evaluation in the specific subjects, identifying strengths and weaknesses. The criticisms leveled at Waldorf reports (worst case scenarios) are that it is not clear to whom they are addressed (pupil or parent), to what extent an accurate picture is given, the degree to which indications are given as to how the weaknesses can be overcome, or simply that they contain generalized formulations that year for year indicate no development or change. At best Waldorf reports have the potential to be highly sensitive instruments of evaluation and motivation.

In student or pupil profiles (the Dutch speak of pupil success systems), a series of developmental stages are noted and commented upon by both the teacher and the pupil (usually from the middle school upwards). In the

self-evaluation the pupils can reflect on their learning, on their strengths and weaknesses, what they enjoy, what goals they set themselves. The pupils can focus on school work, behavior, attitudes and their own competencies.

### **Forms of learning and appropriate methods of assessment**

Different modalities of learning require quite different forms of assessment. The following table, though much over-simplified, makes this clear. It should be noted that good teaching usually involves a blend of various forms of learning and therefore requires differentiated forms of assessment.

While these learning stages reveal a vertical and age-determined progression, they can also be found at differentiated levels within a given age range. This table can, of course, be extended.

### **Forms of examination**

Exams naturally have an element of challenge. This is their best quality. It is an opportunity to say to a pupil, show me what you can do. As soon as we comment on a child's contribution with the words, "You have done that well" (assuming that is a true assessment and not simply a hollow phrase), we are applying criteria for assessment. In Waldorf education we draw these criteria from the subject matter itself. The children learn from the first grade onwards to recognize and value the colors, tones and forms. They learn that a line is either straight or not and whether the form in eurythmy has been moved successfully or not. Activities are judged in their contexts, e.g., whether the bread we have baked tastes good or whether it was in the oven too long or is too salty. Life, with a little help from the teachers, usually makes it apparent whether the qualities are right or not. When not, the questions immediately arise, "Why not?" and "What can we do to make it right?" We are committed in Waldorf education to creating a positive culture of learning from mistakes rather than punishing them. We can learn from mistakes and we want to learn is the basic principle that sometimes gets lost in translation.

## Different learning forms need different forms of evaluation

### *Learning mode: Imitation*

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*Characteristics:* Imitation presumes the presence of competent role models.

Learning through participation, copying, repeating later what one has witnessed or been deliberately shown, some imitation can be explicit.

*Preconditions:* Interest, awareness, certain level of relaxation and sense of well-being (sound emotional and psychological basis needed).

*Possible form of evaluation:* Documented observation, e.g., in profiles

### *Learning mode: Learning through explicit teaching and instruction*

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*Characteristics:* Usually through planned, deliberate showing, demonstrating, describing or exemplifying of the stages and steps of specific processes. Best done in context.

*Preconditions:* Willingness and ability to concentrate for a given time span and sound visual, auditory, motor abilities (relaxed awareness). It is necessary that the learner is stimulated in his feelings and can identify with the content and learning process (i.e., he feels that it is relevant and important).

*Possible form of evaluation:* Through recall, specific questioning of detail by the teacher of the learner, through application in recall and through application in problem solving

### *Learning mode: Repetition*

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*Characteristics:* Learning through repeating of activities, processes (ideas and words) what has been experienced. Needs variation and focus to maintain interest and momentum.

*Preconditions:* Rhythm, routine, artistic structure or content, relevance and ability to apply what has been learned to specific contexts

*Possible form of evaluation:* Activity can be witnessed and documented

### *Learning mode: Storytelling*

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*Characteristics:* The teacher (or pupil) presents complex content in narrative form verbally.

*Preconditions:* Listening, empathizing skills (both storyteller and listener)

*Possible form of evaluation:* In verbal or written recall, in creativity by the storytelling

***Learning mode: Deliberate observations, including focused and focusing questions***

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*Characteristics:* Observational tasks are given either with or without specific focusing in a specific area of experience (e.g., text, series of problems, specific setting, etc.).

*Preconditions:* Meaningful context, interest and identification (e.g., also relevance), good observational skills

*Possible form of evaluation:* Set tasks and assignments with clear instructions, tools (both techniques and technology), written or verbal (usually with a spectrum of possible correct answers)

***Learning mode: Discovery***

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*Characteristics:* Outcome, open exploration of phenomenal no predetermined outcome. Emphasis and reflection of experiences. Also learning through doing in practical contexts, where the outcome is specific (a task that needs doing) but the experience is also open. It is also open what forms are used by the learners to give expression to their discoveries.

*Preconditions:* Confidence, good basic skills (conceptual, literate and oral, organizational), motivation

*Possible form of evaluation:* Self-selected method of reflection and reporting: diaries, portfolios, short talks, exhibitions, etc., competence proofing

***Learning mode: Self-directed learning with support***

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*Characteristics:* The learner chooses the topic/theme, carries out the work alone (or in a team) and receives support on request from the teacher.

*Preconditions:* As above, plus the ability to ask for and knowledge of how to ask (or seek)

*Possible form of evaluation:* Portfolio, presentations, dialogue, competency profiling

### *Learning mode: Independent working*

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*Characteristics:* The learner asks his own questions, sets his tasks, chooses his own methods and motivation

*Preconditions:* all the above!

*Possible form of evaluation:* Portfolio, presentations, dialogue, competency with portfolio

It is in the fifth grade that one can first begin to talk openly with the pupils about the learning process itself. One can discuss what helps and what hinders the learning process. From this age onwards the children can begin to reflect on their own feelings and their own learning process. How many new words can I learn in French and how do I do it? They begin to be interested in how different people are and how people learn differently, things they have intuitively known before but can now begin to observe and verbalize. In sixth grade the question of learning gains a new dimension with the awakening of new faculties that make causal thinking possible. (“How do I learn something? What do I have to learn and what have I actually learned?”)

Testing to verify what has been learned is an important element in the learning process from this age onwards. Correcting and learning from mistakes are particularly important from now on, not least because of the awakening critical faculties and the interest in the learning process it generates. (These processes are addressed fully in the existing Waldorf curriculum content.) The pupils can learn at this age how work can be corrected and how one can discuss it.

The social processes that are involved are also very important parts of the learning process. Helping each other begins to take on a new character, one that has more consciousness and awareness of individual differences and qualities. Team work is not achieved through authority at this age but rather out of mutual recognition and through the joy of meeting challenges and is closely related to the ability to learn and work independently – the best team player is the one who is also self-reliant. Challenge also involves friendly rivalry and competition between equal groups of mixed ability. The team ethos is, “We will manage it,” with the emphasis on “we.” Non-academic and informal learning are just as important to evaluate.

The task is to awaken an awareness for the relevant criteria: Why are we doing it? How should it be? What is expected from us? What are the limits of our skills? This kind of evaluation can apply to organizing a stand at the Christmas Fair, performing in a school festival, or climbing a mountain. Pupils are quite capable of identifying their own relevant criteria and goals and assessing their own achievements.

## **Portfolios**

Students choose examples of their work (in a range of different media and not just on paper) which they document and provide commentary. This allows for a much more individual presentation of attainment in which the strengths and weaknesses of the individual in a varied and focused form are far more concrete in its quality of expression than with formal marking or grades. A portfolio tells us far more about the learning process and development of the individual than tests or other forms of traditional exams.

Many Waldorf schools around the world are now working with portfolios because they offer many more opportunities to present the values that Waldorf education hold important within the learning process. In many cases these portfolios are accredited as contributions to public exam systems (and not only in art, where portfolios have long been used).

Working with portfolios assumes that certain basic competencies have already been acquired by the pupils and therefore if the work is to be fruitful, there need to be many preparatory stages of introduction, particularly in regard to pupils working independently and in groups. The limitations of portfolio work become apparent in schools where these preconditions have not been met or where the teachers are not aware of the extent to which their teaching approach has to change to allow more creativity and self-determination on the part of the pupils.

One of the key factors in portfolio work is reflection and self-evaluation. These skills have to be cultivated in stages from the middle school upwards if pupils in the upper school are to be able to use them meaningfully in relation to portfolio work that demands a high level of personal involvement and self-awareness on their part. The pitfall is that without adequate self-awareness of criteria, the portfolio can become nothing more than a random accumulation of disconnected material.



## Accreditation of learning

The international educational landscape has changed much in recent years and now provides many ways of accrediting pupil achievements other than through traditional exams. In some countries Waldorf schools already have external accreditation for various forms of learning attainments. The main advantage of such systems of accreditation is that no curriculum content is prescribed but rather learning levels.

If one takes the aspect of independence as a criterion to assess levels of learning, which is often done, then one can identify, for example, four levels of learning:

- An entry level at which the learner makes a first acquaintance with the subject. Here the criteria have to do essentially with being receptive.
- At the next level a degree of practicing that which has been taught is evident. Little self-initiative is required and the pupils essentially follow instructions within a clearly defined structure. Assessment concerns checking that basic skills are practiced and mastered adequately.
- At the third level a portion, approximately a third in terms of time, of the learning is self-directed or with minimal input from the teacher, who remains on hand to check, support and guide. The remainder of the time is teacher-led. This is the level of most normal school teaching.
- At the highest level (within this framework) the learner is primarily responsible for the process, with a small degree of input from third parties in the form of advice or training (at the request of the learner and only as a result of the learner's initiative). This is the level of independent learning achieved by good twelfth grade projects.

Such a distinction of learning levels can run concurrently in upper school classes. One could have pupils working at different levels of independent learning on projects (practical, artistic, or academic) or even in a main lesson. According to the criteria chosen, one can then determine the extent to which each learner has fulfilled them, in effect whether they have “passed” or “failed.” However such a system is geared to all learners passing, at their appropriate levels because the task of the teacher is to ensure that the pupils have the

appropriate techniques and materials and are working at the right level. With more or less guidance every individual, with good will and effort, can fulfill the criteria. This is the antithesis of the selective principle used in conventional exams, where sometimes even the quota of grades is predetermined and a percentage is preprogrammed to fail.

### **Student journals**

Often included with a portfolio is a student journal in which the learning process itself is described and commented on by the student. These are particularly valuable in documenting experiences during work experience or other practical projects, including class plays. The techniques of journal writing need to be introduced and the pupils allowed considerable scope for individual creativity. As a learning competence, journal writing is an extremely useful technique to master for many professions and obviously also for university studies. Such journals can also be included in the assessment for the accreditation of informal learning.

### **Conclusions**

What could a Waldorf Graduation Certificate look like to also meet the requirements of access to higher education? The short answer is what the Norwegian Waldorf schools have: a certificate that demonstrates the fulfillment of the main educational aims of Waldorf education by a specific individual. A more complete answer would include that it would show how this individual expressed those competencies. It would show a high degree of independence on the part of the individual learner and would give answers to the questions: Who is this person? What can he or she do? What does he or she want to do? And after all that, what an employer or the admissions officer of a college or university needs to know. If we manage to achieve a deepened understanding of our pupils, if we manage to improve the quality of our educational provision through evaluation and quality development, then it will be possible in future to meet the requirements which the state and indeed the times make on education. Evaluation has a role to play in making those undoubted values that Waldorf education nurtures not only more visible but more impactful.

**ENDNOTES**

1. Christoph Lindenberg, *Waldorfschulen: angstfrei lernen, selbstbewusst handeln*.
2. Loebell, P., *Ich Bin, Der Ich Werde*, Stuttgart, Verlag freies Geistesleben, 2004.
3. See the ICRG's report, *Guidelines for School Readiness*, published in 2004 by the Pedagogical Section in Dornach.

This article is an extract out of a forthcoming publication on "Evaluation and Learning in Waldorf Education." The original can be ordered from the following: [rawson@waldorfschule.de](mailto:rawson@waldorfschule.de).

# Endings or Openings? Graduating or Launching?

by Rüdiger Iwan

Translated by Karin DiGiacomo

A few years ago I found an article by Bruno Sandkühler, teacher at the Michael Bauer School in Stuttgart, Germany, in which he argued against graduation at the end of the twelfth grade. He undoubtedly made an excellent argument. However, the printing press imp played a trick on him in one place. Sandkühler demanded, "... in the future, each school must have its own Abschüsse [This typing error changes the meaning of the German word "Abschlüsse," which means graduations, to signify "launchings" as in launching a missile.] It evokes the image of students shooting out into life. However the contrasting term "Abschlüsse," meaning "graduations" or "endings," is equally ill-fitting, and the question really is what should we be dealing with – maybe we should talk about openings. This play on words may indicate that we should change the final exams leading to graduation into an examination process which is commensurate with the individual development of the student. We teachers are all-too familiar with these exams and have in vain been hoping for their demise. [The German graduation called the "Abitur" is earned by passing a huge battery of written and verbal tests in which the student has to prove his/her knowledge of all subject areas which he/she studied during the entire senior year. These tests extend over several weeks and are usually experienced as a great burden to teachers and students alike.]

A small number of schools are already making efforts in that direction. The Freie Waldorfschule in Backnang, for example, has taken this question as the starting point for designing its high school curricula. At the Freie Waldorfschule in Potsdam the director, Thilo Koch, is actually working with the public education department on this question. I will now cite a few examples of the situation in Schwäbisch Hall, the school where I teach.

## Examination without fear

Three years ago we collected in a folder for each student some selected pieces of ninth grade work, which had been created during the school year. At the end of the school year the students were asked to present to the teachers what they had achieved and assembled as bodies of work in lieu of examinations. Although the students had been apprised of this presentation at the beginning of the school year, they were surprised that now the time of the presentation approached in earnest. During this first year the content of the folders was not at the level of excellence that we had wished for, so we added the request that in addition to presenting the work contained in the folder of that year, the students should choose something that they had learned and could add to the presentation. On the day of the presentation exam the students were very excited. They went into the presentation, met the task and afterwards felt very relieved. The important thing to note is that they were not afraid. This is really an essential observation. The mood resembled that of an artistic presentation and was free of the usual fearful atmosphere experienced during graduation exams. The director of the school told us about his own son who came home after this presentation/exam, enthusiastically shared his experience at the dinner table and then began to dance around the living room. The refrain he sang during his dance was, "Exams are cool, exams are neat ..." He was just happy that he had been allowed to inform his teachers and share his knowledge for half an hour.

We teachers also prepared for the presentations. That is something like an in-house education. For example, for one of these exams, I worked together with the needlework teacher of our school. My colleague felt she was unfit to participate in this task. "Hey, I can't do this!" and I replied as consistently, "Oh, yes, you can!" I mention this to illustrate how we in Schwäbisch Hall do the human resource work necessary to meet the challenge. Well, she finally did her part and did it excellently.

I still remember one student in particular. She was very gifted musically and artistically; she got up in the second part of the presentation, walked up to the blackboard and declared to our great surprise, "I will now explain the Otto-Motor." It was really startling to hear her say that. My colleague and I posed a lot of questions to her, especially since we both did not sufficiently remember from our own school time what we had learned about the functioning of the apparatus

that she sketched on the blackboard. Another highly gifted young lady, during her presentation remarked, “Now really, Mr. Iwan, you have just asked questions whose answers you didn’t know yourself. That’s really rather strange.” To which I countered, “And how do you think I like exams for which I know all the answers ahead of time? What good would it be if I expanded each of the student’s answers into a lecture of my own?” “Boring?” – “Exactly!” – “Then it was more interesting for you this time,” she reflected.

At this point we broke through the paradigm of objective knowledge. When we make that change, we as teachers can face a problem: We lose control. But what we gain as teachers is honesty in one’s own questioning attitude and the authenticity of the interaction.

### **Questioning one’s own questions**

The following year we asked our colleagues to design their teaching approach in such a way that it would be possible for the students to pick a topic from the subject areas offered by the teacher in class and go into more depth with it independently. We are calling this principle “integrated annual presentation.” This annual presentation has the disadvantage of being done outside of the usual instruction in class. We have integrated it into this instruction. That changes quite a few things. One needs, for example, time to suggest and implement something like that. It changes our way of teaching, our attitude towards homework and classroom work. Everything starts to come into motion and impacts the structure of teaching and one’s own understanding of what teaching really is.

I would like to present a passage from a work resulting from this process. It expresses a new quality. A student had decided to more closely explore a court case, which she was studying in conjunction with a block about the era of Goethe and Schiller. She had very thoroughly researched the case and written an extensive report about it. Following the teacher’s suggestion to take a candid look at her own project, she wrote in her afterword: “I find and found the project very interesting. But I ask myself: Where does my interest in this lie? I couldn’t find the answer to that question until I really got clear on what all it would take to steal from one’s own grandfather.” And in summation she remarked, “I am interested not only in what someone does, but also why it was done.” In reviewing her own work, the student deepened her interest in the

subject matter. In evaluating the school year, she said that she had learned to track a historical era from the beginning by questioning her own questions.

In this brief article I can only point in the direction of this new culture of learning and of exams, which is oriented towards the individual development of the student. This new approach no longer follows the old one-size-fits-all policy of public education. I can guarantee you that many of our students today, experiencing this new approach, will be able to assess the difference between the old and the new forms and will be even better prepared to pass through the final exam period than the generations before them.

All of this has been developed in cooperation with Felix Winter at the High School Forum in Bielefeld, Germany. Efforts like these have also been underway for several years in many other places. The Perpetuum Novile Schulprojekt Gesellschaft founded an international work forum in cooperation with the High School Forum in Bielefeld. Representatives from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have joined in this circle; they come from schools, colleges and from the business sector, and all of them are working in theory and practice on developing these new forms of teaching and testing. This process helps to perpetually individualize the culture of learning in our schools by changing the form how exams are formatted and handled.<sup>1</sup>

For Waldorf schools that can translate into a format that at graduation time allows the treasures gathered during the school year to be proudly displayed in a presentation instead of being ignored and lost.

## **Parents as allies in the campaign towards a new culture of learning**

At the end of this past school year in Schwäbisch Hall, we had the impression that the emerging portfolio, containing the work of the entire year, was addressed not only to the teachers but also to the parents. So we organized a joint student-parent-teacher evening event. The portfolios are out on display at the beginning of the event. After reviewing the school year we asked the parents to each choose a folder and have that student articulate its contents. So students and parents engaged for half an hour in animated conversation that actually deepened an appreciation of the last year's work; the participants felt unanimously that this event was positive and supportive.

A few days ago during an evening with the new eighth grade parents, we heard many concerned comments about the approaching high school years. It was not the first time they voiced such concerns. “Wasn’t there some danger that there would not be enough guidance?” “Wouldn’t the students fall into a black hole that they would only emerge from right before the final presentations?”

Those parents who had already participated in the new format and witnessed the new developments countered, “That wouldn’t happen in the classes based on the portfolios process. In those classes an orientation process was slowly but surely set in motion, which would benefit the students way beyond graduation time.” The experienced parents became the ambassadors of our school’s new culture of learning. As we continue to strengthen such experiences and we find that the parents are our best allies in this campaign.

#### ENDNOTE

1. See: Themenheft “Noten, Zeugnisse, Prüfungen – ohne Alternative?” *Erziehungskunst Heft*, March 2002 “Grades, Reports, Exams – Without Alternative?”

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# Learning Autonomously

Disinterest Instead of a Thirst for Knowledge

by Thomas Jachmann

Translated by Karen DiGiacomo

It is a known phenomenon that some students lose their enthusiasm for school. Ernst Michael Kranich writes, “The relationship that the young person has with the school becomes progressively problematic. In the first four classes of elementary school about one third of the students feel that school impacts them negatively; during middle school more than two thirds (sixty- nine percent) of the students; and in high school – particularly in the highest grade – nearly eighty percent experience school as a negative factor in their lives.”<sup>1</sup> He admits that this situation today is to a certain degree also true for Waldorf schools.

This negative development especially impacts the enthusiasm for learning. The joy in coming to know and understand the world is part of the general joy in life and the basis for self-realization. This joy should under normal circumstances last throughout one’s life.

Does not the young child have endless questions which we are supposed to answer, hopefully all at once? Naturally, the young child brings all these questions along to school. But over time this thirst for knowledge disappears and boredom and disinterest increasingly take its place. How does that shift come to pass? Is it possibly schooling itself which drives out the enthusiasm for learning? Many children and parents make that claim. Are they right?

## Independent learning before school entry

When admitted into first grade, the children are often well-versed in reading and writing. Many of them can even read to me from a book. When I ask how they learned it, I am often proudly told, “I taught myself.” Again and again I ask myself why these children have to go to school if they are learning things

perfectly well all by themselves. Are these abilities we notice today absorbed with mother's milk? Are reading and writing in our culture learned in much the same way as walking, speaking and thinking – by active imitation? Are we not putting on the brakes to a self-starting learning process by making these children attend school?

During the late Middle Ages a good part of the middle class and of the urban population could read and write without having had formal schooling. By the time that public schooling became obligatory, a large part of the adult population could already read and write: in America around seventy percent, in Scotland eighty percent, in England seventy percent and in France approximately sixty-five percent. So how does it come about that, for example, in Switzerland today there are about 20,000 to 30,000 adults who cannot read – or read insufficiently – or write in spite of obligatory public schooling?

This phenomenon, which is called “functional illiteracy,” is in most cases rooted in negative school experiences and lack of support from the parents.<sup>2</sup> Teachers seem to overlook the fact that the children are already entering school with individual learning styles, which they have discovered independently. Instead of honoring this learning style, we approach the unsuspecting first grader with more or less sophisticated techniques for reading, writing, and arithmetic. We do not realize that with this approach we drive out the successful learning strategies that the children have found and developed on their own. Is that why so many students so quickly lose their enthusiasm for learning?

## **The inner urge to explore the world**

As a young teacher I was able to let the children continue to learn very freely in those first years. At that time I was again and again amazed at how the children learned with ease and certainty without my adding much more than the opportunity for regular practice. These learning successes I have not been able to match with any teaching method for reading or writing. These methods did save time, the children learned somewhat faster, but they did not learn with the same certainty, and some even developed anxieties around learning.

Does it astonish us then that children lose their enthusiasm for learning if they are not allowed to adopt their own style of learning? They are forced without good reason into a learning style that may not be appropriate for them

and on top of it they develop anxieties. I will never forget the fright and fear that overcame me as a first grader when in the first week I was supposed to draw a “K” in class and the teacher stopped by my desk and declared my work – which I thought was well done – as roundabout wrong. Why? “You drew it with the wrong hand.”

Today left handers can mostly write in their own familiar way; but we overlook that any predetermined learning strategy is alien to the child and engenders uncertainty – unless it is his own, freely-chosen approach. We do not realize clearly enough that children have an inner urge to explore the world and that they have long found their own way in that endeavor. When they come to our schools, they have already developed various degrees of knowledge and skills. (When we look more closely and without prejudice, we may even ask if they do not bring along their own individual urge to learn right from the beginning.)

In the fourth educational recommendation of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, this problem is aptly addressed: “There is no school maturity that children reach, but only a school that approaches children right where they are in their learning process; if a school does not do that, it is a bad school.” And it goes on: “Faced with the growing diversity of children and adolescents, it becomes necessary to deal better with such differences and to create learning situations that meet the children on their individual levels.”<sup>3</sup>

The specific inability of schools to deal with such diversity certainly is a main cause to the rapid decreases in the enthusiasm for learning. Why do we meet a greater degree of diversity in today’s children? Does this diversity in learning levels and styles manifest as a result of varying levels of knowledge due to their socioeconomic situations, as the foundation report wants to make us believe? Or are we faced with a deeply rooted process of freedom and individualization, which finds its particular expression in each individual child? The present generation is becoming more and more individualistic. Why is it then so hard to understand that it adamantly demands its own learning style for every single student? Is not such an apparent demand rooted in the strong will for freedom and for autonomous learning? Autonomous learning, however, in its last consequence renders school, as we know it, unnecessary. How can we do justice to such an appropriate wish for individual freedom in our schools, if it is school itself that continuously puts the brakes on such freedom?

**Based on Rudolf Steiner's teachings about the human being,  
Waldorf education can answer this question.**

### **School, an encroachment on the freedom of mankind**

First of all we must examine the question concerning the trust in our own free development. In education that would mean: Will the student learn that which is right for him at the time that is right for him? Will he follow his inner compass or will he misuse his freedom if he is allowed to learn in a free and individual manner? In other words: We have to fix through education the damage done by encroaching arbitrarily upon the freedom of the child. We have to repair the damage done by interrupting the natural, meaningful development of the child by sending him to school. Or is there no such natural, autonomous and meaningful development?

Steiner addresses this issue decisively: "We are not as aware as we should be of the step backwards we have taken in the development of man; at one point we were on a level where people allowed their children to grow up more or less wild; they did not give them any particular formal instruction. At that point the freedom of man was not encroached upon, they did not interfere with the natural development as we do. At the age of six we begin to encroach upon the freedom of the human being, and we have to restore what has been improperly destroyed in that phase through schooling. We have to restore it through right education. We have to become clear that the 'how' of education must improve lest we are going to face a terrible situation.

People may remark as much as they like on what high a stage we have reached in our culture, how few illiterate people there are nowadays. But an education that does not compensate for this loss of freedom only produces students who are regurgitating what has been fed to them at school."<sup>4</sup>

So school means a radical encroachment upon the free development of the human being – and thus regression in the development of humanity as a whole, a step back that must be compensated for. When a person is allowed to develop in freedom, she will become who she really is, she self-actualizes, which also furthers the development of humanity as a whole. One can fundamentally trust the free development of the individual. It leads in equal measure to a meaningful

development of mankind. Actually the conscious awareness of this fact has grown in the last hundred years.

## Learning with passion

Karl-Martin Dietz talks about the development of the generation of young people during the last thirty-five years, and he calls the youngsters' trust in their own development self-realization. "I do not always want to be the servant of other masters – neither in my professional nor in my personal life."<sup>5</sup> One could correctly add – also not in school.

"I strive to realize my fullest potential!" In the last twenty years I have been hearing this statement like an ever-louder sigh emerging in all that students say and do. In its highest form it means: I learn independently, passionately.

Learning with passion is the highest level of learning said George T. Betts (University of Northern Colorado, USA, September 2003) at a conference about highly gifted and talented students.<sup>6</sup> He continues, "Do you have passions that you pursue ardently? Do you support and further such passions in your students?" And we could add: Do you strive for your life to be a manifestation of your full potential? Students starting in first grade today pose this question. That is the foundation on which they want to learn. To discover one's own passion and to cultivate it means to recognize one's proclivities and talents and to develop them fully. In this path, the teacher must boldly, freely and courageously lead the student. On this path the student will then follow *in his way*, with joy. More than ever the student of today demands radical originality of the teacher.

## Authenticity and creativity

This is the only way that a teacher today can become the "beloved authority" for the children, which they need during the second seven years of their life. As mentioned above, children learn freely, propelled by self-ignited passion long before the first grade. The child has achieved a piece of self-realization and wants to continue this process. In no way does he or she want to become a "cookie-cutter imprint" or "robot." In the second seven years of life the child is not over-challenged if he or she continues to self-actualize passionately according to his or her talents and proclivities. The child is not thrown into premature

independence or social responsibility if he or she can freely choose and work through various subject areas (with the help and advice of a teacher, of course).

### **Authority is rejected**

Today's children will experience guidance through authority – however well-meant – as an encroachment upon their naturally developing personality. Already first graders will no longer follow authority of their own accord, as Telse Kardel still wants us to believe.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, they follow any inner guidance only if and in how far an adult models a passionate and self-directed life for them. Only the gesture of inner-directness makes the adult an authority. And the children follow such a gesture. (This should not be confused with imitation during the first seven years.) By following this process of finding and actualizing one's self in the adult and following in their footsteps in their own way, the children come to know themselves and the world. Only in 'this sense' do they see the world with the eyes of the teacher. All other guidance merely elicits obedience.

But the path to freedom is not found through obedience, however well disguised! This insight is not contradictory to Steiner's demand for repetitive action, which furthers the development of the faculty of willing by doing something "because it has to be done." We can awaken a sensitive understanding for just such repetitious actions, even if they merely have to be performed as a task. The children gain ownership of the task only through such sensitive understanding, which must be enlivened again and again. Only then can the educational support for the faculty of willing become fully effective. That is why Steiner attaches highest value to all artistic work and practice, because in art we joyfully exercise with repetitive practice and with sensitive understanding. (See also *The Study of Man*, fourth lecture.) Anyone who has observed such a free learning process in children over an extended period of time, objectively and without prejudice, knows exactly that such learning has nothing at all to do with intellectual overload or premature responsibility.

### **A new approach to schooling**

We as teachers have to re-think and re-learn in a crucial way! The "how" of classroom instruction can no longer be defined by the way I prepare my lessons and by my choice of teaching methods. It must rather be defined by my

own process of self-development and self-realization in the work I do with the child. The profession then becomes one's passion and then we perform teach passionately. In this way our profession becomes a lifelong, self-directed learning process, which we strive to manifest consciously.

In this sense Waldorf education can be 're-thought' as Hartmut von Hentig said so poignantly: "In the new type of school a large part of learning must indeed proceed on an individual basis. Each child has his own challenges and seeks the teacher's support when he needs help, or the teacher offers it to the child. Self-reliance (or self-realization) as much as differentiation and acceptance of differences requires an independent choice of one's tasks (ignited by passion) or at least participation in choosing when or what one learns."<sup>8</sup>

In Waldorf education this process of independent learning requires the presence of the teacher who decisively influences the child by taking a positive and accepting stance, untainted by prejudice. It requires the presence of a teacher who models such development through his own education and self-realized living.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Ernst-Michael Kranich (editor), *Unterricht im bergang zum Jugendalter*, Stuttgart: 1997, S. 9.
2. Ollivier Keller, *Denn mein Leben ist Lernen. Wie Kinder aus eigenem Antrieb die Welt erforschen*, Kempten: 1999.
3. Professionalität und Ethos. Plädoyer für eine grundlegende Reform des Lehrerbewusstseins. 4. Empfehlung der Bildungskommission der Heinrich-B Stiftung, Berlin: 2003.
4. Rudolf Steiner, *Menschenkenntnis und Unterrichtsgestaltung*, GA 302, Dornach: 1986, S. 66.
5. Karl-Martin Dietz, *Erziehung in Freiheit, Rudolf Steiner Über die Selbstständigkeit im Jugendalter*, Heidelberg 2003.
6. Frank Rothe: "Beagbunen fördern, Lernen individualisieren," in *Erziehungskunst*, 12/2003, S. 1415f.
7. Telse Karde, in: Ernst-Michael Kranich: *Unterricht im bergang zum Jugendalter*, Stuttgart: 1997, S. 9. S. 153 ff.
8. Hartmut von Hentig, *Re-Thinking School*, Weinheim: 2003.

# How Meaningful Is Homework?

by Telse Kardel

Translated by Jon McAlice

People often complain that the Waldorf school is quite stingy when it comes to homework. There are good reasons for this. An education that strives to remain true to the realities of life cannot afford to focus itself on abstractions, even those that are common in the mainstream. It has to take into account everything that is at work in human development. That means, more than anything else, that we cannot be loading down our children with homework. Homework is often a hidden cause of poor digestion. These things may only show themselves later in life, but they are nonetheless present.<sup>1</sup>

This statement, which Rudolf Steiner made in a talk to doctors, is something I stumbled across a number of years ago. Since then I have paid more attention to the question of homework. How meaningful is it? What forms should it take? How should it evolve during the course of a child's development?

## Points of light in the eternal grayness

An unprejudiced perusal of biographies, either one's own or those of others, can often be a valuable help in solving educational riddles. When doing this one can observe one's own memories rising to the surface, cloaked in feelings and emotions. My own memories of doing homework are immersed in a uniform grayness, which as I grew older was pierced only periodically by moments of light-filled joy and happiness. If I look back with the care of an unbiased observer, I see that it was usually the voluntary, self-chosen tasks that were tackled with the most élan. But there were also rare assignments that I was able to make my own. Today I know that many of these exercises and topics



anticipated and prepared central themes of my biography that would surface much later in metamorphosed forms.

It is rare to find biographies in which school is characterized as being a totally happy experience. Yet in almost all memoirs, we find such ‘moments of light’ which have deep meaning for the future destiny of the individual. Without exception, these revolve around projects or exercises which arise out of joyful independence and from the trusting love of the teacher who initiates them. Carl Spitteler, the Swiss writer, describes it this way: “This Moeckli (his drawing teacher), although he was not famous, was an exceptional artist. I can still see him using a soft pencil to conjure forth an oak tree for fun during a drawing lesson. We boys watched him as though he were a magician. In addition, he was an extraordinary teacher whom I remembered longingly for many years. He was the only one of our teachers who taught us something worthwhile and important, something we wanted to learn and by which we felt challenged. Ah, the incredible insights, how shadow and light share the face of a sphere, how light appears from behind the invisible back of the sphere, blurring its contours. The blessed instructions as to the difference between sharpening a pencil and sharpening a colored pencil. The different ways to use charcoal, crayons, and pencils to do shadowing, and so on.”<sup>2</sup>

A few pages later we find another example, from another school:

How were the drawing lessons? The boy, whose eyes were filled with the most majestic images of nature, was planted firmly before the drafting table, and was met with parabolas, squares and parallel-rules. Straight lines, something the masters themselves do not always achieve without losing something of their magic, was the first goal. One was fortunate if all one’s courage and joy did not vanish at the outset. Then we were turned loose on ornaments. Year-in, year-out we doodled with French curves, finishing lines and parallel shadowing in the indents. Four, or if things went well, six ornaments would be finished in a year, some on blue, some on brown paper, some done in pencil, some in chalk. And all for the vanity of the parents, the boasting of the examiner and the regrets of the talented youth who in the meantime had filled hundreds of sketchbooks out of pure artistic joy. The exams, the central hypocrisy of school, was the focus of every task, even in drawing class.<sup>3</sup>

This is the approach to teaching drawing that is least likely to inspire a pupil to do extra work. Yet these two passages show clearly what the challenge is. On the one side we see a guiding hand, leading lovingly, without pressure, allowing the student to take things up in freedom. On the other side, students are forced pedantically to do exercises which never reach their actual goal. Pupils feel themselves to be “without guidance and with no-one to answer their questions,” although it would appear as though the path were clearly laid out. The first teacher is completely immersed in the process that he wants his students to experience. He continues to practice with enthusiasm the skills that the students need to learn, and they follow him willingly. The second teacher is focused on the purely technical aspects of drawing and expects results that can be measured by an examiner. This is an approach that doesn’t leave much room for human freedom, nor does it stimulate individual will.

As teachers, we find ourselves constantly between these two poles: How wonderful are those moments when the students joyfully plunge into a lesson, further it with their own contributions and actively help lay the groundwork for what will come. But then how easily one finds oneself as though in the shoes of the latter, whether trying to cover all the content laid out in a lesson plan, trying to bring all of one’s pupils up to the expected standards (often under perceived parental pressure) or in anticipation of future exams – an expectation shared naturally by all those involved.

### **Mandatory or voluntary**

Let us take a closer look at voluntary motivation. In his meetings with the teachers of the first Waldorf school, Rudolf Steiner speaks about it repeatedly: “Homework ought to be set as a voluntary task, not as a duty. ‘Whoever wants to do it!’ ”<sup>4</sup> “Homework should never be set unless you know that the children are going to be eager to show you their results. The thing must be alive and should be done in a way that makes them more active and not in a way that kills their enthusiasm.”<sup>5</sup>

He goes on to say how math homework should serve in part to prepare students for what will be covered on the next day. With seeming nonchalance, he continues: “And then wait and see whether the children have the initiative to do the preparatory work at home. Some of them will volunteer, and that will

make others want to do it too. You must get the children to do what they ought to do for school because they want to do it. It should come from the child's own willingness to do something from one day to the next."<sup>6</sup>

Discussions in later conferences bear stark witness to just how difficult it was even then to awaken the will of the pupils. But Steiner continued to emphasize that children "should be spared from tiring homework" and should not be made to fill "notebooks with homework. They should never have the feeling that they are about to collapse under the homework." But then he comes to the concept of a kind of "modified homework." We want to "[make] allowances for some individuals, set them problems to do at home. Encourage the hard workers to practice at home, and make sure that we do not overtax them. They must not have the feeling that they dislike homework; they must do it willingly."<sup>7</sup>

We can find many passages in a similar vein. And then there is this one: "A fundamental principle is that we must make sure they do their homework, and see to it that it never happens that they don't do it."<sup>8</sup>

We should keep in mind that each of these passages is in response to concrete questions from individual teachers working with specific age groups. There is, however, a common thread: The kind of teaching that is being striven for is one which finds the right balance between freedom and commitment, between voluntary participation and taking responsibility for working as part of a group and, finally, between individualization and the participation of the whole class. This is the goal. What capacities does a teacher need to acquire in order to reach it? My own experience has led me to approach the question of homework differently at different ages.

## **A developmental approach**

During the first few years of school children have trouble building a bridge between the experiences they have in the classroom and their home life. Memory at that age is still quite spatial and contextually defined. A child quite often only remembers what happened in class one day when he or she returns to the classroom the next. At home, the memories tend to sink into the depths of a child's soul, giving parents a rather sketchy sense of what the children are actually learning. How in the world can we expect children at this age to summon the presence of mind needed to do homework? At this age, however, love and

devotion can move mountains. If the teacher says something like, "It would be wonderful if someone would bring in this form drawn again beautifully on another piece of paper tomorrow," the inner connection most children have with their teacher is so strong, that they rarely forget to prepare this gift for him or her.

In the course of the fourth grade, this approach should go through a process of transformation. The children's relationship to the work they do at home should emancipate itself from their connection to their teachers, and they should begin to experience a sense of obligation to work through again at home what they have done in school. The teacher can stimulate children to do certain exercises to address specific weaknesses. If these initial steps are successful, most children in the fifth, sixth and seventh grades will do their exercises faithfully, if for no other reason than out of a sense of community. That children at times complain about homework is par for the course at this age. An essay from a sixth grader (written voluntarily about the use of conjunctives) gives us some insight into the labile balance between freedom and necessity: "If we were to be given no homework, we would have more time in the afternoon. However, the result would be that we would either have to do all our work in school or not do any work at all. We would have less time to practice, and would have to understand everything much more quickly. This would be good for those students who only do work under pressure and do not get any enjoyment out of it. More time would be available for hobbies. Perhaps one would then write essays now and again just for fun and the teacher would find her pupils to be more enjoyable."

It is only when pupils reach puberty, in the eighth grade, that a truly independent, intentional approach to homework begins to be possible. Individual life motifs begin to surface, and here and there we see pupils begin to cultivate their own style of working. This individualization has to be approached carefully, because the youngsters still have a strong notion that each should receive the same treatment as everyone else. If one wishes to encourage some children to do more, or allow others to do less, one finds that this can only succeed if the class community has been properly prepared. It is only in high school that a student discovers an individual sense of duty. "The sense of duty cannot be developed before a youngster can grasp the significance and consequences of the concept 'duty.' An understanding of child development lets us recognize that this is a task for the third seven-year period in a child's life."

If, by approaching homework in the nuanced, developmental manner sketched out above, we can lead a pupil towards the tasks that lie before him, we will also have strengthened his life-forces. Uncertainty, nervousness and a lack of self-confidence are widely seen today to lie at the root of various illnesses. And we will have nurtured the possibility that he or she takes up 'duty' through choice, or, as Schiller says, out of sympathy, and, in doing so, places his or her own will freely within the context of the universe.

#### ENDNOTES

1. GA 313.
2. Spitteler, Autobiographischen Skizzen.
3. Ibid.
4. Conference January 1, 1920.
5. Conference September 11, 1921.
6. Ibid.
7. Conference June 21, 1922.
8. Conference September 11, 1921.
9. Originally printed in *Erziehungskunst*, December 1989.

# When Is Homework Necessary?

by Walter Kraul

Translated by Karin DiGiacomo

Homework is as controversial as it is unwanted, but is it really necessary? This is a never-ending story, it seems, which is again and again subject to debate and discussion. Our magazine, *Erziehungskunst*, dealt the last time with this topic was in an article by Diedrich Wessel in vol. 9, 2002. We are resuming this discussion now with the following article by a very experienced Waldorf teacher.

In my opinion, the issue of homework still presents problems and lacks solutions. This author has arrived at the conclusion that there should be no mandatory homework. This viewpoint is supported by manifold comments of Rudolf Steiner. So far so good.

We can draw two conclusions here. The first one: I will not assign obligatory homework. I merely will inspire the children by suggesting what they could do at home to complement the class work at school – provided they want to do that. That way I am being a good Waldorf teacher and, on top of it, I avoid trouble. As a teacher one can indeed try to create homework assignments which the students will complete joyfully and out of their own free will. For that we need skillfulness and educational artistry.

The ideal case: The children come home and are on fire to record, repeat, expand or practice what they have absorbed in school. In the approach outlined above, we find only indirect hints about how to accomplish this feat. The question is: which homework assignments are fun, and how must they be formatted to be enjoyable? Here I would like to insert a few more or less poignant examples from my past experience.

I was still a child and had just started to learn to write, unfortunately not at a Waldorf school. I remember being told that the children in a class (it may have

been a third or fourth grade) at the Waldorf school in Stuttgart were allowed to write a book. They all were enthusiastic and wrote and wrote for several days. It was definitively very skillfully arranged by their teacher. How different would have been the effect if he had demanded an essay about a certain topic. This teacher reached even me, an outsider: I began to write a book. I illustrated it with many pictures and loosely hand bound it; this little book still exists today.

Many years later when I was a class teacher and found it necessary for my students to practice writing essays, I suggested creating a collection of animal stories for the school advent fair. Many lovely stories were put to paper, based on the personal experiences of the students (or on their imaginations) – they were copied, bound and offered for sale. I must say, though, that I was not able to spark quite as much enthusiasm as my colleague had been able to ignite.

Another time I had to teach the history block “Discoveries and Inventions,” one of my favorite blocks, by the way. The main lesson books were supposed to be illustrated. I bought linoleum and the necessary equipment and suggested that the students could create linoleum cutwork. The class started to buzz and several amazingly beautiful linoleum cutwork pieces were produced. We chose the best ones and printed quite a few of them. Students who wanted to do so could paste these pictures – or their own – into the appropriate spaces in their main lesson books. This was of course a voluntary activity during the creation of the required main lesson book. I believe we were all very happy during and after this main lesson block.

More and more often we teachers discover in the main lesson books pictures which are copied from books. I would like to voice serious doubt whether that constitutes a true activity. And can we really consider the creation of a main lesson book as an assignment that is completed joyfully, orderly, and as a matter of course? That would be ideal. Should not the teacher occasionally support the students by reminding them or supervising their progress, especially when the end of the block is approaching on the following day? In either case the teacher ought to review and acknowledge the homework that the children did with or without “being forced.” Once in my seventh grade, a girl did not come to school for three days, and I had not received an excuse; so I called the mother to ask how the daughter was doing. I found out that Sabine<sup>1</sup> had left home as always and had returned at the usual time. So she had been playing

hooky. During the next faculty meeting I was allowed to present this case. My colleagues contributed their own observations as well. We could not arrive at a solution for the problem and were basically clueless about what to do. The next day, when Sabine had once again not done her math homework, I reprimanded her: "Sabine, it can't go on like this!" When I came home my wife held up the telephone receiver: It was Sabine's mother. Had I once again been too strict? The mother asked, "What have you done with my daughter? Sabine came home and was just radiant. She said, 'Mr. Kraul really likes me! And all other teachers too! I like going to school again.'" Now Sabine is grown and a mother herself, and her children go to the same school where she thought the teachers didn't love her.

In my opinion at least one subject absolutely requires repetition through practice: mathematics. No matter whether math is done at home or in school – practicing it should be enjoyable. How can we accomplish that?

One day the teacher of a third grade was out sick and I had to substitute; my colleague had asked me to introduce decimal point calculations. As usual I had assembled a practice sheet for the first day with simple problem examples for homework. Since I was not familiar with the students and their math abilities, I closed the lesson fifteen minutes before the bell rang and told the children they could start on their homework. They started their calculations with wild enthusiasm and even before the class time was over, some children had completed their work. But they were not satisfied: "Are we allowed to solve more problems at home?" Fortunately I had several copies of the practice sheets left over and they could take them home. But that was just the beginning.

In the evening I got a call from one of the mothers whom I knew well. She told me that her daughter had been doing math all afternoon while the other children had played outside. She still was not done with her homework. I told her about what had happened at the end of the lesson. The mother became concerned about her daughter's being so slow, but we agreed that Johanna should stop working on her math homework for the day. Two years later I had to substitute in this class again and this time I was supposed to introduce fractions. I had prepared problems whose solution produced an infinite series. I pointed that out to the children when I asked them to do some further calculations at home. The questions came: "How many fractions in the series should I do?" "Up to ten." "And I?" "You can keep going up to twenty." That allowed them to figure out where they ranked. In the evening the same mother called me again.



“Johanna worked on her math problems all afternoon again, but this time she enjoyed it,” she reported. The next morning I asked Johanna how many fractions she had produced. “Up to forty-two,” she answered. By now Johanna has long graduated and studies medicine.

In the traditional math text books there are usually very few simple beginners’ problems and then immediately “more interesting” ones, which are more difficult. But it is much more helpful to the children to give them a lot of simple problems in the beginning. Those who have some difficulties can still arrive at the correct solutions and enjoy the practice again and again. In everyday life simple calculations are dominant anyway. For the gifted students we have more challenging problems ready, possibly some that contain tricks or even traps.

Here is a story about the joy that one can experience while doing math homework: The second day of my substituting I announced the correct solutions. Each time Karin had found the right answer she jumped onto the chair and cheered in delight, throwing up her arms. At present she is a colleague in the Waldorf school.

I also have had good experiences with ‘series assignments’ whose results show certain patterns, e.g., 1 - 3 - 5 - 7 - 9 - 11, the odd numbers. It is satisfying to be able to continue the series. But something is lacking here – there is no element of surprise – it is too easy to guess the next step. So I choose, for example, the series 1 - 3 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 9.

Creating such assignments requires effort and time. During the school year it can be difficult. So I have assembled two math problem booklets that many colleagues have also found helpful for text problems and work with fractions. The observations given above have been considered in making these booklets. Many colleagues and students have told me that the exercises helped to make learning math fun. The booklets also provide space for recording the answers. The advantage: there is order and no loose sheets to fly about. Solving all the problems in such a leaflet is also satisfying.<sup>2</sup>

Here is another experience in this context: Around ten o’clock one morning my telephone rang. A youthful female voice complained that the fraction math booklet was unreadable. I asked if maybe a page was misprinted and offered to

send her a new copy at no charge. She did not give me a clear answer, but rather I picked up that the other party was very upset. The background noises sounded like ones that I am used to hearing during school breaks. The conversation ended abruptly. Shortly after that, another similar call came through. Afterwards I realized what must have happened: a dear colleague at some school had distributed my math booklets and asked the students to get to work right away. There were at least two girls who found this to be an imposition, and during the break they called me on their cell phone to let me have it. I have no idea how the situation was resolved.

One thing is clear: It is extremely difficult to attain the ideal of having an entire class do their assignments joyfully, without compulsion and driven by sheer enthusiasm. I do find homework necessary in mathematics, though. And with classroom time being continuously reduced, with free Saturdays, ever longer and more frequent field trips, workshops in industrial, agricultural, and social skills, I ask myself how we can offer the students a full range of learning material without homework. Those are all valuable activities. But whenever I get an old main lesson book into my hands, I am amazed at how much knowledge was transmitted.

After a geography block a student once came to me and asked if we could give him an old map that was no longer needed; it was in our storage room where the large maps were kept. He wanted to hang it up in his room as a wall ornament, a poster, so-to-say. I was able to fulfill his wish. Currently he works in a publishing house for travel guidebooks.

Every day during a main lesson I would call students up to the front, where the large maps hung, and ask them, for example, "Which cities are situated on the Rhine? Name them in correct order." The student would answer first while standing with her back to the map, then turn around and point to the cities she had named. They eagerly competed with each other to be called up. As a preparation I recommended the repeated study of the maps in an Atlas. I was amazed to learn that several families did not own an Atlas, but my suggestion that each family should have one was not unanimously welcomed at the parents' meeting.

That is why our schools should have well-stocked libraries for the middle school grades. When the class teacher is teaching a certain topic she can come

to class the next day with the corresponding books under her arm and present them: “Here I have a few books about Copernicus. Who wants to read one?” Sure, this approach costs money and time, but it is worth it. The children get started on subject-oriented reading and the requests for a textbook become muted. We even have annotated books lists, which can be recommended for this kind of study.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, I would like to relate an interesting story. In my middle school class I had a boy who was peculiarly laid back. He consistently and intensely tried to figure out how he could write any assignment with the least amount of effort and without skipping anything essential. Richard was elected class president. One day he came to me and said, “I am supposed to tell you that you give too much homework. But I don’t think so.”

Sometimes life corrects itself. I had a student who just would not do math dealing with percentages. “I don’t need that – I’ll be a pediatric nurse,” Erika pronounced. She left school after tenth grade and immediately got an apprenticeship at the prestigious Schwäbinger Hospital in Munich. I lived in that vicinity. One evening the doorbell rang and there she stood. “I received my first assignment in the dairy kitchen, and all amounts in the recipes are expressed in percentages!” After two evening sessions the problem was solved. A short while ago I met a mother in a Waldorf kindergarten. She gave me greetings from her grandmother Erica, who had told her that once I had taught her how to work with percentages.

With these remarks I hope I have injected some life into the topic of homework. We can see that it is not so easy. It is certainly apparent that our students do not always want to be handled with kid gloves. In the lower grades children are allowed to do homework assignments by completing or practicing things they started in school. They usually like to do that for the beloved teacher. In middle school, towards the end of the classroom teacher time, things change considerably; the teacher has to extend more effort and only in secret the children are glad for a serious talking to by teachers and parents.

The issue of homework is met creatively not only in Waldorf circles. Some time ago I heard an interesting radio report about an upper Bavarian village school where four teachers, in powerful cooperation, got the children to engage in their work so eagerly that “they didn’t even notice that they were learning.”

However, that required extensive preparation – sometimes the entire village supported the process. Every child there gets a written assignment each week that has to be completed. The children seem to be enthusiastic about it. 4

Practical experience teaches us: Whether by force and duty or matter-of-course and enthusiastically completed, there is no black and white in matters of homework. Let us make an effort to try to find the appropriate path in each case! That is not an easy matter. The recipe is easily given. The teacher dives so intensely into the subject matter that she/he can pass it on to the children with infectious enthusiasm.

#### ENDNOTES

1. All names have been changed.
2. Available at Walter Kraul GmbH, Neufahrner Weg 2, 82057 Icking, Germany, tel (from USA): 011 49 8178-44430.
3. “Literatur zur Waldorf Schule,” an anthology edited by Ursula Kalthau, available at the Association for Free Waldorf Schools (Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen), Wagenburgstr. 6, 70184 Stuttgart, Germany.
4. “They don’t even notice they are learning; the success story of an upper Bavarian village school.” Broadcast on July 13, 2002, by the Bayerische Rundfunk in the program ‘Saturday Notebook’ (Notizbuch am Samstag). The manuscript is available by sending a pre-addressed, stamped envelope (letter size) to: Bayerischer Rundfunk, Rundfunkplatz 1, 80335 Munich, Germany.

# Homework – Obligation or Free Task

by Diedrich Wessel

Translated by Karin DiGiacomo

How do we stand on freedom in education? One point comes immediately to our attention. Young people of all age levels today demonstrate a high degree of self assuredness and independence that would have been unthinkable even a few years ago. We support them in this quite a bit – for various reasons. But every so often a ‘little dictator’ awakens in us when the adolescent stands opposite us and does not share our wishes and ideas. A general reason for that is parental concern that the children might not be able to stand their ground in the competition of life if they have not passed certain school exams. Accordingly, they exert pressure. The parents themselves yield to this pressure; it prevents them from considering that there may be individual difficulties that indicate an alternative path for their child. Essentially their trust for the child’s destiny is shaken.

Rudolf Steiner notes in the introduction to the second edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom*: “No longer should our scientific teachings be formulated as if their acceptance were a matter of irrefutable necessity. Nowadays, nobody would like to give a scientific treatise a title like Fichte once did: ‘Crystal clear report to the wider public about the intrinsic essence of the new philosophy. An attempt to compel the reader to understand.’

“Today, nobody is supposed to be forced to understand. We no longer want to stuff insights down anyone’s throat – even if they are still immature or childlike; rather, we try to develop their abilities so that they no longer need to be forced to understand, but want to understand” [emphasis by Steiner]. Here is the first mention of themes that would later be integrated extensively into Waldorf education. This leads us to the question of trust.

## Trust versus homework?

Does trust need to be practiced first, or is it not enough to put it into practice? It would be enough if we did! Frankly, we do the opposite. We practice mistrust! We meet this undisguised mistrust in the motto: The child must be assigned required homework. Some parents and teachers become adamant: Homework has to be given from first grade on so that the child learns to do his/her duty from the beginning.

That is nothing more than a fabrication of the individual teacher, and it can indeed be found in Waldorf schools but never in Waldorf pedagogy. Rather it is diametrically opposed to Steiner's educational indications. We find this contrast already appearing in the first generation of Waldorf teachers. Requiring homework demands consequences for the students who do not complete the assignments; otherwise the teacher would lose credibility. So now the student brings the punishment upon himself.

If we think like that, then we completely lack trust in the will of the child to do what he/she can. That means that one may even try to push one's own will and ideas onto the child against his/her own potential. We must not forget that already in infancy we can observe an irrepressible will to imitate the environment, to finally get up and walk just like the people that surround the child. As he develops further the child consistently finds the urge to practice that which is discovered and to learn new things. This can be observed on every visit to a playground. Individual differences in siblings can be observed from the very first days on. From the beginning and in each developmental phase, the child needs the loving attention of the grown-up. This insight is gaining popularity today, at least in theory.

Afterwards, we can often notice a change in this positive attitude of the child. Why is that happening? And when? Normally we can observe that in first grade the children are happy to be treated just like the older students by being allowed to do homework. It only becomes a problem when later this "duty" is not fulfilled for one reason or another, not even after a conversation. Bad feelings spring up between the student and teacher and the relationship is impacted negatively. Those students whose talents allow them to experience homework as a normal, enjoyable challenge would do it also without being coerced by the concept of "fulfilling one's duty." This concept is simply a nuisance not only in

the lower grades but also for several more years to come. Then there are quite a few children who really go through varying degrees of torture to accomplish their homework. The full burden of punishment is unloaded onto those few students who completely falter or simply refuse to do their homework. In this climate of coercion one really cannot expect a sensitive treatment now: trust is lacking – the belief in indispensable homework rules!

## **Free assignments**

Obviously the school of today cannot be the same as the school of the 1920s. Steiner compromised with the state and the teachers. He did not “butt his head against the wall.” Otherwise we would possibly not have Waldorf schools today. Rather this educational model has proved its vitality for over eighty years now. Would we modernize it if we were to follow the currents of the time and agree with the opinions of our day? Certainly not.

Further development of Waldorf education can only be achieved if we bring thusfar unrealized aspects of this educational system into the light of consciousness and work with them, and for this subject that would mean: required homework or free assignments? And I add: trust or mistrust?

What would be more natural to a free school than to trust the will of the students to grow in every respect and to master life? There is a point at which the teacher is powerless anyway. In class, children only take in what they can absorb, and only if their interest has been awakened. “We no longer want to stuff insights down anyone’s throat – even if they are still immature or childlike.” According to Steiner, all coercion is futile. Awaken the interest!

## **About the current situation**

Parents who send their children to a Waldorf school know there will be, and mostly is, obligatory homework. Even though this was not the main factor in their school choice, now we cannot implement a change without their cooperation.

It is a different situation if the faculty is willing to make changes right away in a first grade class and in the years to follow. In that case of course it is just the teachers’ decision, because the parents are informed right from the start that there will be no obligatory homework.

In this context we can rightfully question the legitimacy of continuing the antiquated system of required homework in Waldorf education. Has this practice ever supported the development of young people in the process of coming to know themselves, of self-actualizing? With this practice are we not always at odds with the educational principles of Steiner? Can strictness and coercion ever serve as principles of education?

“Education is healing” is the leitmotif of Waldorf education. “All instruction should make whole and healthy so that the spirit-soul dimension of the children can harmoniously integrate with their physical nature,” writes Walter Riethmüller in his introduction to volume 5/2003 of *Erziehungskunst* which is dedicated to the topic “Salutogenese.” How long will we continue to violate this motto? Or do we think our way of dealing with homework is congruent with these positive models?



# The Art of Conversation: Speaking and Silence

by Heinz Zimmermann

Translated by Nina Kuettel

We come into contact with our fellow human beings in a myriad of ways. The most common method available to us is the spoken word combined with the appropriate language of gestures. We greet one another, ask for the milk, ask for directions to the train station, express our happiness about a gift, express our unhappiness about a high tax bill, remind the little girl on her way to school to be careful, search out common knowledge or try to come to a decision through conversation, explain the functions on a new computer, or comfort the child who has fallen off her bicycle. It is always words, gestures, and mimicking that do this service for us and thereby essentially configure the way we live and interact with others.

In a certain way speech stands between thought and action. Words can bring thoughts to expression, inform, teach, explain, bring others to action, and prepare decisions. A single word can completely change the relationship to another person such as an encouraging or critical word, a word of acceptance or one of denial, a promise or a 'no' when considering the possibility of a future together. Conversation mediates between thoughts and actions and endows people's relationships to one another. Looking more to the position of the speaker, we can ask ourselves about his motives? What kind of impulse is behind a statement? What does one want to achieve with a contribution? What is driving the speaker to this formulation exclusively? Do my words convey what I mean? These are all questions which derive from motive. Looking closer at the one to whom the words are directed I ask myself about effect: comfort, instruction, injury, motivation to action, solution, and so forth. These are all effects that words can have. Speech is sensible only when it is directed to

someone. If we observe how people converse with each other on a daily basis it will be clear to us that it is not only the speaker who is affecting the listener but also a mutual influence is present from the outset. The spoken contribution will change according to how the listening is done and how the position of being across from one another is perceived. This immediate, mutual influencing is especially important. When we look at other forms of communication we see that this aspect is partly or completely missing.

For example, with telephone calls the visual influence is missing. The voice on the other end is also not immediately perceived but electronically changed and reduced. In the same way, eye contact, gestures, and body language, in other words, the immediate perception of the speaker, is also completely missing. Everyone who knows this will do well to consider what they can and cannot talk about over the telephone. In place of a fresh perception of the other there often appears only what is imagined, and that can open up all kinds of doors to misunderstandings. It is less problematic if one is talking to very familiar persons. The telephone is good for exchanging information. But if we are trying to resolve conflict, we would be better off to choose a conversation in person.

The presence of the conversation partner also makes for the difference between personal conversation and something that is written, printed, or presented on a screen. These messages are less immediate, more anonymous and the partners are, in fact, separated. An inflation of the words by means of all these above-named media indirectly influences our daily communication. Often we see that there is a terrible lack of skill. While we are able to communicate with any part of the world at any time, it is increasingly difficult to find the path of person-to-person communication. In this age of computers which make it possible to communicate with others even in space, we are less and less successful in truly understanding others. The opportunities for conversation occur much more seldom in our hectic times. The entertainment among family and friends as it was in earlier times has given way to an entertainment industry. Increasingly we are losing heartfelt relationships to those surrounding us. Only when we consciously cultivate conversation skills and take steps to increase our abilities in that art will we be able to have real human encounters again.

## Factors that play an important role in conversation

Let us begin with the outer conditions required for conversation.

**1.** Where will the conversation take place? At a table so that everyone can see one another? In a small, large, dim, or bright room? On the ski lift? During a walk? While doing dishes in the kitchen? These are only a few examples. The location significantly influences the form and content of the conversation, making for different kinds and qualities of conversations.

**2.** The time: Does the conversation take place early in the morning, at lunch, in the afternoon, evening, or at night? Is it spring or winter? Or a hot summer's day? How long does it last? Five minutes, an hour, or an entire afternoon? The time aspect is a second factor to which we must pay attention if we wish to have a particular conversation. One must especially observe how the conversation partner talks in the conversation. Are the participants still attentive to the subject or have they become tired? When should one take a break? What questions can be asked, when, and in what order? These are all questions concerning the time aspect.

**3.** Another factor is the subject of the conversation. Are we getting together for casual conversation? Must we reach a decision? Is it about the reporting of something that has happened? Is there going to be an examination? Or a test? Are we trying to find common knowledge or must we correct someone? All of these questions have to do with the subject and the goal, the motif of the conversation. Every conversational goal requires a different preparation and behavior. It is a disappointing experience to discover after an hours- long conversation that one person expected a decision to be made and the other was expecting merely an exchange of ideas.

**4.** Finally, we must heed attendant circumstances. Does the conversation occur at a busy train station or in the presence of construction noise? In a room where there are many other sense impressions (large windows), in comfortable easy chairs, on hard stools, while standing or walking? Again, these are factors that influence the form of the conversation and should be noted.

Together, all of these factors form the situation of the conversation: place, time, subject, and attendant circumstances.

Important additions to this are the conversational partners and their relationship(s) to one another. First of all, look at the number of persons: A two-person conversation has a completely different character than a conversation between five participants. There are people who express themselves very differently when with only one other person or when in a circle of eight or ten people than they do in a much larger group. Depending upon the homogeneous quality of the group, after a certain number of participants, there really needs to be a discussion leader. A potential conflict may require this even with only two participants. A group that works well together may manage without a discussion leader even with up to fifteen participants. In this case, each person feels equally responsible for leading the discussion. After a certain number (about twenty to twenty-five) the character of the discussion changes as often single representatives will speak for others. The larger the number of participants, the more organizational aspects must be considered such as taking turns to speak, lists of speakers, time constraints on each speaker, order of the speakers, and so forth.

The relationships of the participants to one another also decisively influences the course of the discussion. Have the participants known each other a long time and do they work well together? Or is it an ad hoc discussion in which the participants are meeting for the first time? In the first instance it can be expected that there will be a certain implicitness present because of the well-established relationships. Of course, the habitual nature of the relationship may carry with it the danger that the course of the conversation will become stereotypical. Sometimes one knows the other too well, meaning that one has preconceived notions about the other person. Tension and expectation can enliven first-time conversations. On the other hand, it is easier to have misunderstandings because one has misjudged the other. Often there are statements whose only motive is to distinguish one's self in the eyes of the other.

Certainly everyone has experienced how the character of the conversation changes drastically when a certain person is not present. This shows how significant is the configuration of the discussion partners. We will return to this aspect later in another connection. The conversation itself is significantly determined by how things are spoken, how they are heard, and the subject of the conversation. Before we look closer at these elements, let us look from a certain viewpoint under the surface of conversation.

One often says that we exchange information during a conversation. However, that is a very superficial description of what actually happens. Pure presentation of information is only a small, superficial part of a conversation. If that were not so misunderstandings would occur much less often because they can only happen if one assigns a different meaning to a word than was meant by the speaker, or if one did not correctly hear what was said. Such misunderstandings are usually easy to clear up and put aside. However, the information level of conversation is only one level, the surface, so to say. The source of misunderstandings is usually to be found somewhere else completely. In order to go deeper into the reality of the conversation, let us take a look at the following dialog:

Him: "What is that green stuff in the soup?"

Her: (irritated) "If you don't like it, cook yourself!"

Viewed from the standpoint of information there is absolutely no connection between the two statements. To the question of what was in the soup the woman answered that he should cook himself. The reality of the conversation is not present at this level. Behind the man's question the sentiment is hidden: "You can't even cook right. I'm unhappy with you; try a little harder for once!" The woman reacted to the reality of the communication with the remark that if he did not like it he could cook for himself. In order to come out the winner of this dialectic game the man could unexpectedly add: "I just wanted to know what the green stuff was in the soup. Aren't I allowed to ask questions anymore?" But in reality it was not a genuine question. It was not his interest in the soup that prompted him to ask but his dissatisfaction with the culinary talents of his partner. He pretended interest and thereby changed the dialectic level of the conversation.

Friedemann Schulz von Thun characterized this phenomenon beautifully when he said that one must really listen with four different ears. We hear the practical, informational aspect with the first ear, the relationship of the speaker to us with the second, what the speaker is saying about him/herself with the third, and with the fourth we perceive an appeal or a challenge to us. Our example contained a question about what was green in the soup at the practical, informational level. But what was meant by the question occurs at the relationship level: "I think you are a bad cook." What the speaker was saying

about himself was: “I deserve a better meal.” And at the level of the appeal or challenge we can hear: “You need to be more concerned with my well-being.” We can more easily solve problems between us if we would directly communicate what we really wish to say instead of going through a detour of the apparently practical/informational level. Well-practiced partners will therefore pay attention that they openly formulate their true issues. Then they can be handled directly.

We can often observe in daily conversations how what is meant differs from what is said. For instance, “I was just asking a question” can sound like a strong antipathy to the other’s proffered suggestion. In reality, it is not a question at all but the expression of antipathy or doubt. Also the remark, “I agree completely, but ...” often does not convey agreement but rather hesitancy. Since the real statement, that is, what is really meant, is hidden behind another statement, such conversations often have an emotionalizing effect and create tension.

In our example we find another element which colors the statement in this way: the tone used to ask the question. Right away the woman hears in the tone what is really meant by the question. I use tone to color the practical/informational level of the conversation with my subjective undertone. A certain tone can turn a ‘yes’ into a ‘no.’ It is often small, filler words that communicate strong nuances in feeling. Aha, so, but, even, and again are words that, depending upon the tone, convey the most varied nuances. “Where have you put my shoes again!” is an example of how the tone and the usage of the word “again” can be imbued with accusation that calls forth an instinctive negative reaction from others.

That brings us to the meaningful level speech perception through the ear. Because we live in an age of silent, written language, we often pay too little attention to the musicality of speech. Oliver Sacks wrote in his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* about the different effects of a televised speech by Ronald Reagan on one group of patients who had left-brain injuries and could therefore not comprehend the meaning of the words in the speech and another group who had right-brain injuries which allowed them to understand the meaning of the words but they were unable to differentiate between a male or female voice as well as the finer nuances of speech melody. While the one group who could only understand the word meanings followed the speech with serious facial expressions, the other group who could not understand the word meanings

perceived the finest nuances of the voice and recognized the phraseology and theatricality of the entire speech. Sacks posed the question of which group had better understood the speech. There are obviously different levels of understanding. Certainly one important and often misunderstood level is the coloration that occurs through the human voice. While we usually pay attention to the thought content with our intellectual awareness, the voice has more of an effect on our half-conscious life of feeling. Achieving basic competence in conversation must include tapping into this world of musicality in speech with all its various aspects and implications. One can then begin, when the situation allows, to hear a conversation in such a way that one consciously sifts out the meaning of the words and concentrates totally on the sound. This becomes obvious when one considers hearing conversation in a foreign language that one does not understand. One must put one's attention at a completely different level, one that is not less communicative than the intellectual level.

### **How do contributions to conversations happen?**

When we witness a lively conversation it seems perfectly evident that the individual contributions are expressed in a sensible word order. However, when we carefully observe ourselves in the situation, we notice that this sensible word order is not at all something to be taken for granted; yes, even a simple formulation is like a miracle. Before we make our contribution to a conversation we seldom know which words and in what order we will use. Very often we will not even know the exact configuration of what we wish to say until it comes into our consciousness while we are speaking. The content is developed in more detail as we begin to speak. Sometimes people are amazed themselves at what they have just spoken because they did not know what they were going to say until they said it. Heinrich von Kleists wrote a famous essay titled "The gradual completion of thought through speech." It is a fact that, as small children, we learn to think by speaking. If I wish to clarify a thought I must only try to formulate it in speech and it will become more clearly configured. We can achieve the same thing during conversation. Further, the way in which the other listens to me and asks questions usually helps me to better clarify my own thoughts, much better than silent contemplation.

We can observe further that it rarely happens that we always and easily reach a formulation. It depends upon the situation – my own state of mind, the way in



which the other listens, and my own emotional reaction to what is being said – whether the words flow easily from my lips, are blocked, or, in the case of great agitation, explode from my mouth. Long-held anger, for instance, can end up as a powerful storm of words that may even amaze the speaker when he looks back upon it. On the other hand, a sarcastic, deliberate smile on the part of the listener can lead to stammering and, finally, silence. It really is a wonder how thought content is transformed into speech forms and how these, imbued with meaning, can be heard using our tools of speech.

My intention in speaking occurs just before I speak. A feeling arises in me and I give it spoken expression. I answer a question that is asked of me. Depending upon the situation and my state of mind, this intention is more or less imperative. A strong emotion that is called forth by a spoken contribution or a perception so completely fills the speaker that she/he thinks little about the other person or about the logical continuance of the conversation. It is very different when, during a delicate, information-oriented conversation, I must weigh every word in order not to injure the listener on the one hand and on the other hand to be factual and to the point. Depending upon the degree of awareness about the intention, we can speak of a speaker-oriented, a partner-oriented, or a subject-oriented contribution. In the first case I live mainly in an I-consciousness, in the second case in a you-consciousness, and in the third case in an it-consciousness.

These emphases actually constantly alternate during the course of a conversation. Depending upon the theme of the conversation, one or the other of these aspects will be in play. When someone tells about his vacation, then it is naturally speaker-oriented. It sometimes happens that the listener will take on a speaker-oriented role and at the first opportunity will tell of his/her own experiences on vacation, thus blocking the report of the first speaker. Everyone knows of someone in his circle of acquaintances who will always, sooner or later, turn the conversation to himself, relegating the others to listeners. I can only be of help to someone in need if I speak with a partner-oriented attitude. A conversation based on informing or making a decision must be mainly determined by a subject-oriented attitude. However, all the other aspects must always be present in the background. For example, if the partner-oriented attitude is missing during a subject-oriented conversation, one can go around in circles for hours because one has not noticed that the partner has long



ago stopped paying attention or perhaps, because of hurt feelings, constantly interrupts. One must alternately direct one's attention to the three aspects of "I," "you," and "it" in order to give the necessary contribution, appropriate to the situation, which will lead the conversation further. It is especially important that I am always aware of how my contribution will affect the other. To achieve that I must educate myself in the school of listening.

### **What effect does my contribution have?**

I can best answer that question by turning it around: What effect does the other's contribution have on me? The most basic effects on the listener are usually not clearly apparent to the speaker. That is, the effects on breath and the larynx. With every word that we speak a mimicking movement of the larynx is created in the listener. This involuntary mimicking activity goes so far that something spoken in a hoarse voice will create a weakened hoarseness in the other. If someone speaks short of breath and asthmatic, the same is involuntarily carried over to the listener, and he or she has trouble breathing. Tone, melody, accentuation, the way in which speech is configured in the stream of breath, all of these things are immediately and involuntarily transferred to the listener. Therefore it becomes clear how speaking directly affects the well-being of the other and what an elementary social process is conversation. If I pay attention to how the speaker influences my breath and larynx, I will become aware of the effect of my own speech on others.

Through my voice I have an effect on the half-conscious feeling state of my conversation partner that is completely independent from the content of my speech with which I call forth sympathy, antipathy, or indifference. There are people who can speak only in a whining tone; other voices sound basically accusatory, cautionary, know-it-all, encouraging, agreeable, flattering, anxious, harsh, and so forth, and they all create corresponding reactions. There are voices that are so irritating to the listener that he has already formed an opposition before he has even completely understood the meaning of what is being said – simply because of the provocative voice. Again, we should become aware of this dynamic. Perhaps we could even ask a good friend sometime about any one-sided effects of our own voice. Everyone knows how sensitively one reacts to corrective criticism or critical remarks about one's voice. After all, the voice is a piece of one's self. For that reason it can be of great significance to

try to overcome the limits through speech exercises or perhaps by consciously remaining silent in certain situations.

A third area of influence that is independent of speech content is the emotional charge of words. Words are not only conveyors of meaning; often they carry their own emotional value. Certain words can have an effect that is nothing short of magical. In Paris during the French Revolution it could cost one's head if one greeted another with the old "monsieur" instead of the new "citoyen." To this day the word "Führer" still makes one think of Hitler. For similar reasons the use of the word "race" can evoke emotions. Every society has such emotionally charged words. As soon as an intense experience is connected to a word, that word, for that society, has a certain magical effect. In some cases it may evoke laughter and in other cases hate and enmity. For productive conversation it is advisable to consciously avoid using such words and replace them with other similar words that are not charged with emotion. In this way one avoids "a train wreck" because one's conversation partner has been gripped by emotion.

Having examined the effects on the listener that are not dependent upon the content of the words spoken, let us look at what promotes conversation and what inhibits it. Basically, one can say that expressions of will and feeling call forth other conversation contributions and therefore promote conversation, even though it can be inharmonious. Questions have a similar effect, however, only when they are real questions. Many things that are put forth in the form of questions are, in reality, not questions at all but either statements or retorts. Questions about a certain subject or about others feed the flow of conversation. Judgments, warnings, and extensive self-revelations inhibit conversation. We can differentiate between questions that evoke a single response (purely informational questions such as: "What is the population of St. Petersburg?") and those that open up a path to knowledge that can be traversed together ("Can we do anything about this situation?" or, "What will the year 2012 bring to us?" or, "How can I get out of this dead end?").

Questions about the well-being of the conversation partner that come from real concern and not just social convention can lead to long and deep conversations. They can become questions of destiny, yes, even questions of redemption. Those people who have grasped the essence of the question will become the best promoters of conversation. The participants will have a sensitive

reaction only if they notice that the question is not genuine or perhaps even has a condescending character.

The following group exercise should help bring the three different effects of emotional expression, question, and judgment into experience: One reacts to a given suggestion in a threefold manner: First, through pure expressions of feeling from enthusiastic agreement all the way to complete disgust. One carries on with this as intensely and as long as possible so that the full effect can be perceived. One should not shy away from overly dramatic expressions since this exercise is more readily implemented with a sense of play. After that, one takes the same suggestion and formulates it into genuine questions and, finally, one goes round the circle many times to gather statements and judgments. By experiencing these isolated elements one can become aware of their effects on conversation. After this exercise one can know when emotion during a conversation is allowable (for instance, because it is freeing instead of hiding it behind a brisk, no-nonsense attitude), which phases call for questions, and which ones for judgmental activity.

We have worked through the fundamentals of how we can go from a spontaneous, half-conscious or unconscious attitude during conversation to an attitude of conscious listening and speaking.

### **Going from unconscious to conscious listening and speaking**

My normal everyday consciousness is usually geared toward what the other person says. That is, my normal hearing is sense-oriented. Once I have grasped the meaning I do not need to listen further. The usual interruptions and talking over happens because of the fact that I am only grasping for the meaning and am oriented to the “what” of what is being said. We find this especially during discussions. While someone is still talking the other person is already thinking about their counterpoint. The participants do not talk to each other but against each other. In the end there are always winners and losers.

A kind of listening that is even more me-oriented occurs when I allow certain words to trigger my mind to wander. This behavior is called associative. During half-conscious listening one catches words or images and then gives one's mind over to its own inner images while listening with only half an ear. These inner images mirror the configuration of one's own life of the mind-soul.

They are drawn like a magnet to the thoughts that have the strongest emotional character. For example, if one has planned a trip for the next day, one must constantly contend with the above-described circumstances. The half-conscious and unconscious excitement about the coming event works like a magnet on all other experiences. Even if one tries the diversionary tactic of reading a captivating book, one's thoughts often will stray back to the coming trip, triggered by a word or an image from the text that leads one associatively back to the emotional center with uncanny aim. The order of the images has no logical connection but rather is determined by their relationship to feelings.

Our everyday consciousness is egocentric. We feel at the center of events and the world around us is on the periphery. Of course, we must develop this center-consciousness in order to even get to the point of consciousness of self. But we must recognize that this attitude will definitely not open up a way to the other person nor make us receptive to perceiving the subject of the conversation. Both these activities require a willful decision to overcome egocentricity. This decision can be made relative to listening, for instance. If I have, at an earlier time, through associative listening, allowed myself to become woven into my own images of feeling, then it is progress for me if I listen in a sense-oriented fashion; in other words, if I orient my listening to the "what" of what is being said. By banning the entire world of tone and melody to my unconscious, I may find myself in another situation of one-sidedness. I must also overcome sense-oriented listening. If I practice taking in the world of sound; progressing from merely "what" to the more expressive "how," I am making progress in the quality of listening and, at the same time, overcoming being trapped within one's self.

### **What discoveries can I make in the realm of sound?**

The realm of sound opens me to the nuances of feeling that have been described previously. Intellectual understanding can be expanded into experiential understanding of what one's conversation partner really means. Active listening reveals to me the discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. I can become aware of my own reactions of feeling to the voice of the other person. This is important so that I might not spontaneously react from my feelings but may set them aside. If I concentrate more on the voice of the speaker I can also hear his momentary state of mind. I can perceive a shaky, uncertain

voice, one that is pathetically soft, ingenuous, or carefree, and I can realize that there is much more behind what is actually said.

Systematic training of one's listening skills can advance to diagnostic abilities. Besides the state of being of the speaker and the nuances of his/her speech through tone, I could have a deeply moving experience. Everyone has his own voice just as he has his own face. If I am successful in really grasping what is unique in a voice, then I momentarily meet the essence of the other person through such an experience. I have given up completely my everyday egocentric consciousness in that I have become one with the other person. Such listening is possible only if I give up my own self for a short time and slip into the other person through his voice. This process can be compared to a conscious falling asleep. I must be able to completely forget myself in this moment just as occurs naturally during sleep. Rudolf Steiner actually described the rhythm between hearing and understanding as one of sleeping and waking. During active listening I completely connect myself with the voice of the other person and lose, for a time, my egocentric consciousness. I awaken to myself with the result of this short sleep experience which is understanding. Hearing and understanding are related to each other just as sleeping and waking. A small child learns to speak and understand through hearing. Adults often skip over real hearing and therefore do not reach any real understanding. This is the highest form of listening that exists. I must be careful to never completely separate the thought content from the speech form. It is a characteristic of language that it is capable of melting together form and content. Through enhanced listening I can perceive the spoken thoughts as well as the essence of the speaker.

According to Steiner there are essentially four senses active here: the sense of hearing; the sense of speech, which grasps what is heard as an expression of something internal; the sense of thought, perceiving unfamiliar thoughts; and finally, connected to all of these activities, the recognition of another ego through the "I-sense." Of course there are other intermediary senses active, such as the sense of sight and the sense of one's own movement for mime and gesture. But mainly it is these four senses that come into use during conversation and determine whether the conversation achieves a superficial or deeper level of understanding. Careful training of these senses especially promotes conversational and social competence.

The highest form of speech consists in forming one's own contributions out of simultaneous perception of content, expression, and I-encounter. Such a contribution is the fruit of individual initiative, and at the same time, it overcomes all autistic egocentricity. If I try to serve only the content with my contribution, I lose the warmth of encounter, and if I concentrate only on my relationship to my conversation partner with my contributions, then I lose the content.

## **Levels of conversation**

There is a certain order of levels of conversational forms that all have their places at the appropriate times. During spontaneous, everyday conversation, drinking coffee with someone, visiting relatives, or celebrating holidays, the warmth of feeling and an ego-oriented form of speaking and listening are naturally what is commonly in use. For organized discussions for the purpose of decision-making or those whose purpose is to spread knowledge, it is expected that the participants all make an effort to promote progress in the discussion. This is subject-centered conversation; it is important that feeling-accented and egocentric behavior be minimized. Arguments, airing of thoughts, and explanations often do not serve clarity but are expressions of will and feeling. Proving another wrong, opinions, and arguments are used to gain victory for one's own will or sympathy. One is then not serving the conversation but rather using rhetorical and dialectic elements to push something through. That is how the power-trip principal works.

When one summarizes the qualities of the forms of conversation one can also say that associative conversation tends to warmth without light: Organized conversation tends to light without warmth. The ideal conversation combines light with warmth. That must have been what Goethe had in mind when he wrote the following dialog between the Golden King and the Snake: "What is more glorious than gold?" asked the King. "Light," replied the Snake. "What is more quickening than light?" he asked. "Conversation," he answered.

Light is an expression of wisdom. During conversation the light of wisdom connects to the lively, human encounter if the individuals are willing to sacrifice their preconceived notions and opinions in favor of coming to a quickening experience by taking in higher thoughts. This can lead not only to new

knowledge (light) but also to a new encounter of being (warmth) with the other person(s). Associative conversation is normally ego-oriented, and organized conversation is usually it- or subject-oriented. The truly quickening form leads either from 'I' to 'it' by way of 'you' or from 'I' to 'you' by way of 'it.'

### **Conversation as an organism of time**

Every conversation takes place in time and therefore has a beginning, a middle, and an end. This time factor shows itself especially clearly in a conversation that begins with the suggestion of an individual and leads to a mutual decision at the end. The initiative of the individual stands at the beginning and at the end we have the common decision from the community. Ideally this conversation would progress from 'I' to 'we.'

Conversations for the purpose of decision making can be made or broken depending upon whether something does or does not happen at the right time. One can experience that someone says something that is met with not even an echo. The same thing said at a later time could be the solution. Bringing the right words at the right time is doubtless what makes one a master of conversation.

How do I know when it is time? First I must become familiar with the general rules of conversation. One could describe the first phase as gathering the basis for judgment. Here one sees that, as far as possible, all the viewpoints, concerns, facts, and opinions are heard. The more extensively this takes place, the more secure is the basis. A second phase which develops organically out of the first is that of reaching a consensus judgment or conclusion. The prerequisite for this is that from the knowledge gained during the first phase, the appropriate weighing and considering occurs. The conclusion of this phase is marked by achievement of a common viewpoint.

Conversations for the purpose of sharing or gaining knowledge can be concluded at this point. However, if a decision or resolution is needed, then a decision phase must follow in which the conclusions of this common viewpoint must be drawn, with the final conclusion being a mutually agreed upon decision. It is advisable in every case to divide these two phases with a break. Already with this loose division one can differentiate between that which is timely and that which is not. Those who are pushing for a decision during the first phase, when the object is creating the basis for judgment, are just as untimely as those



who wish to bring in more parameters during the decision phase. Decisions are often hindered by bringing up arguments that have long since been heard, and repeating them causes the conversation to go around in circles. Making a decision involves nothing more than drawing the proper conclusions based upon what has been presented and making the mutual decision binding on the individuals. The conclusion or decision ushers the knowledge into the realm of the will. However, within the last phase one must also recognize the correct point in time. Just as in individual decision-making, it is recommended that, on the one hand, there is a wide enough basis for judgment so that one does not make blind decisions. On the other hand, there is clearly a moment when one can sense that if a decision is not made now, then the opportunity has passed and it is too late. In certain constellations one can sense the time is ripe for a decision and all the elements have come together. It requires presence of mind to really grasp this moment and courage to actually come to a decision.

One can describe the organism of time in a decision-making process in still another way, as a dramatic process. Drama has to do with polar opposite forces. The same is true of conversations whose purpose is to reach a decision. For example, the person who makes a suggestion naturally has the tendency to want to speed up the process whereas the others, in opposition to this, will ask for explanations and voice reservations; in other words, they will have a retarding effect. After the conversation has gone on for a period of time and the person who made the suggestion selflessly steps back, another process is usually put in motion that, again, leads to polarization. But now it is not an I-we opposition but rather a we-you opposition. The questioning escalates to the point that there are vehement supporters and vehement detractors.

With that the crisis or the turning point is characterized during a dramatic progression. Again, it would be counterproductive to try to force a decision at this point. There would be winners and losers, one group would shut out the other group, and the decision would be a sham. Those who have a feel for timeliness would realize that a creative pause was needed. This break could be used for individual discussions to consider alternatives, to clear up misunderstandings, to heal injured feelings, and with renewed vigor, to finally come to a conclusion in the plenum. A real decision must go through this critical point, in individual as well as group decision-making. Whether the crisis is more subject-oriented or person-oriented depends upon the conversational climate



and the previous formation of the basis for judgment. However, in any case, it is most important that one recognizes when a break is needed, when every further word will only strengthen the blockade or increase the likelihood of hurt feelings. The more people have honed their listening abilities, the more likely it is that the crisis will be avoided or overcome and the process be brought to a satisfying conclusion.

Here I would like to point out an especially effective exercise for developing the periphery of consciousness and at the same time widening one's perceptual horizon when it comes to progression of time and constellations of conversations. It is quite simple but only really effective if it is transformed into ability.

One imagines that one feels pressure to say something to the other person. This forms the basis for the exercise. Then one decides (where the situation allows, of course) to not say anything. This is certainly not easy to do in the beginning, but it shows one how strongly one is influenced by one's own desire to make a contribution. By the same measure one is no longer open to taking in what is being said by the other person. The more one is filled with the desire to speak, the less one is able to listen. It is as if someone is calling and the line is busy. If one consequently carries out this exercise one will become increasingly independent from this emotional 'busy signal' and will therefore increase the ability to devote attention to the other person. This exercise also helps build an active space of silence which makes it possible to become attentive to the actual constellations. One increases one's sensitivity to what is needed at the moment, for example, who should be encouraged to speak at this moment. It is not one's own contribution that is important but that which is right at the particular moment to promote the progression of the conversation. The further one progresses with this exercise, the more one's own effectiveness during a conversation is increased. Those who speak without thoughtful preparation will usually not be so attentively listened to as those who give a timely contribution after a long silence.

Of course, this exercise is aimed only at those people and those situations where one actually will and can say something. Those people who like to hide behind others and who must muster courage to speak at all, they should, first of all, practice risking a courageous foray into the discussion. One can also do this in the form of exercises. Before a discussion one decides to say something

at least three times. Naturally, such possibilities are always dependent upon an appropriate discussion climate and the tolerance with which the others listen.

### **The four elements of a conversation**

The progression of a conversation is configured in a four-fold way. How we recognize and learn to handle these formative elements determines whether new possibilities will be opened to us to effectively promote the conversation.

First, a conversation lives from its content, the material. Talk is exchanged about a certain subject. I can view a conversation from these aspects: adequate material is present, some material is missing, or one is drowning in the abundance of subject matter. Naturally, these aspects change during the course of the conversation. There are phases during which new contributions and new initiatives overcome stagnation. Other phases, such as the decision phases, require a limiting so that one can come to a good ending. Usually it goes from abundance to limitation. At the beginning overflowing abundance is welcome, but then one strives for deepening.

A second element is the tempo. Here, also, we should always try to find the happy medium between too fast and too slow. Pauses for thought between contributions can work wonders. But there are also phases where abundantly flowing contributions are enlivening.

The dynamic of the conversation is a third element. Without sufficient tension no conversation can really get into gear. Dialog is the original principle of drama. Once again, there can be too much or too little. Towards a midpoint the tension increases, and a relaxation of tension must follow which again gathers into a new tension toward the end. Questions, objections, and arguments are tension-creating elements. Answers, explanations, and laughter release tension.

A fourth and last element has to do with the direction that is determined by the motive for the conversation. One can doggedly and systematically move toward the goal of the conversation (knowledge or decision) without tolerating any deviations. Or, at the other extreme, one can constantly allow the conversation to get off course and therefore never reach a goal. The middle ground must be found at this level between moving in a straight line and getting lost in things that are off the subject. When is it necessary to take stock of where one is and have an exchange about how to proceed? Which side paths should be

allowed because they may bring the conversation a step further once it is back on track?

We have now identified eight essential functions in a conversation which must be differentiated and grasped:

The material: limit or renew

The tempo: speed up or slow down

The tension: raise or lower

The directional goal: strengthen or sometimes let go

It is recommended that one review conversations with these functions in mind. This will give one the necessary feeling for appropriately exercising these functions during actual conversations. One can also decide beforehand to set a goal of practice one or another of these functions.

## **Conversation is a circle**

One can now easily observe that in a conversation circle the integral functions so bond to certain persons that they are practically cemented into roles. There are the ready talkers who give their spontaneous contributions on every subject whether or not anyone is listening. There are also those who consistently call for limiting and strive for deepening. There is the pragmatic one who tries to speed up the process and finally get on with it rather than having endless discussion. There is the thoughtful retardant who urges sleeping over things once again. There is the provocateur or the argumentative spirit as well as the intermediary who always strives to smooth the way. We all recognize the one who knows exactly what was said and is constantly trying to get everyone to abide by what was agreed upon and who likes to direct our attention to the protocol. There is also the one whose spontaneous, bright ideas throw all agreed-upon rules right out the window.

There are a few other roles besides that usually appear in opposing pairs such as the idealist and the realist, the optimist and the pessimist, and so forth.

These roles clearly tend to one-sidedness if they are not merely being played by the participants. The ideal would be when everyone is aware of when and what function he should fulfill in order to serve the progression of the discussion just as in an orchestra in which everyone must play his part in order for the

whole to succeed. This ability is present as potential in everyone even though usually one tendency is dominant which can lead to one-sidedness.

It is very destructive, however, if someone limits himself to his role and equally so if the other participants limit someone to that role. Certainly it can be that the same person in another discussion will take on another function because of the different constellation. If people are limited to their particular role behaviors, then one reaches a conversation mechanism in which it can be predicted exactly who will react to whom and how. A discussion circle can then only progress when something is discovered in the others which leads them out of their roles. There is nothing so inhibiting to conversation as a fixated expectation of the others. Nothing promotes conversation more than when encounters are sought by overcoming egocentric stances and encouraging active listening. When one has participated in a discussion circle for awhile, one knows about one's own one-sidedness and will be increasingly thankful when the various one-sided aspects of the other participants also come to the forefront. One will realize more and more that, through these one-sided aspects, forces come into expression that are important to the whole. Everyone has the basic requirements of these forces but not everyone is equally capable of expressing them.

Here one can call to mind the cosmic image of the zodiac where twelve different forces are working and yet are connected as a whole by the Sun which determines the days and seasons. We can see a terrestrial image of this in the painting of *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci in which the twelve different characteristic gestures are all completely oriented to the figure in the middle. They show themselves not only as character types but also as individuals who can develop through their relationship to Christ. Conversational and social competence are bound to the prerequisite that within every person there lie possibilities for development. One does not show him/ herself to be a master in this by striving to always show one's self in a better light thus putting the others in shadow. One recognizes the master in that through his/her devotional ability (the art of listening) the others are brought to expression. Therefore the best exercise for those who can formulate well is to sometimes consciously remain silent. The power of speech will then move into a silent space which will allow the others to open up and contribute. The old saying can now be understood in a new light: Speech is silver, silence is golden.

# Saint Michael in the Midst of Everyday Life

Conversation with Waldorf Teacher Gudrun Koller

by Thomas Stockli

Translated by Ben and Estelle Emmett

To learn about Michael's fight with the dragon it is sufficient to just awaken every day and meet life openly. There are, however, people who experience this fight in a very intense way because they are in life situations that exist outside of the well-ordered and secure normal daily course of events. They are confronted with exigencies and abysses that other people only experience through literature and the media. There are such people in every country. In my country of Switzerland, in the midst of the prosperous paradise of Zurich, you have only to leave the familiar downtown plaza, ride ten minutes in a streetcar away from the bank district and railroad station – and you find yourself in a completely different world! For instance, you will encounter a schoolhouse with 350 children, almost all of them foreign-born. In this educational milieu more than 90 different languages are being spoken. The children come from a vast number of countries and cultures in the world. Here, Waldorf teacher Gudrun Koller has been doing impressive work for many years. Waldorf pedagogical practices, combined with devoted human involvement and openness to the spirit, are united with the concrete practicalities of life. This woman lives day by day, without fanfare, putting anthroposophical work ethics into practice.

All of us have the repeated opportunity to meet something new in our habitual circle; we are all occasionally confronted with a human crisis that can be met with compassion and deeds. The question is: do we heed the “call of Michael,” the summons to engage our own deeds to meet the needs of our fellow human beings?

This conversation with Gudrun Koller began on the playground at recess; she pointed out to us “her children,” a girl and a boy from Sri Lanka, a boy from Bosnia, two boys from Turkey, a boy and a girl from Kosovo, a girl from Somalia, and a boy from Italy. “Aren’t they all just beautiful?” she asked and then told us about the dramatic lives and social conditions of such children, who every year come to her in the introductory class – sometimes fourteen diverse children to a class. This committed educator then related her experiences, quite spontaneously, for three hours, even though that day she had a heavy school schedule. She spoke with a lot of humor and warmth and also with great seriousness and sadness.

### **The urgent situation of the children**

GK: We teachers never know how to organize to get through the next day because there aren’t enough of us. When someone lasts two years here, it’s a long time.

*TS: You yourself have been at this school for thirteen years – how did you manage to do that?*

GK: To be honest with you, I once tried to take another position and I received offers. But it never came to that, since I sensed that my place was here – even though I often reach my limits. Without the practice of anthroposophy I would never have lasted so long.

*TS: What essentially does anthroposophy mean in connection with your work here in a public school? How much do you practice Waldorf education? And how do you experience it in comparison to the activity in a Waldorf school?*

GK: I worked for several years in a Waldorf school. It was too confining for me there. Nevertheless, I am quite convinced of the unique significance of Waldorf education and endeavor every day to draw upon these sources. It must, however, be my individual, self-responsible deed how to apply that creatively day to day. I observe the children, and then comes a bold jump into uncertainty. I look for the appropriate pedagogical intuition. In spite of years of experience something completely new comes into being in each situation. The reaction I observe in the children informs me if I have done the right thing. In this way the teaching becomes artistic and full of life. I don’t “missionize” with

Waldorf principles. When someone asks me a question, I answer openly. It is important for me that education is really sought out by the children and received with gratitude. The artistic handling of the pedagogical content stimulates the children strongly, both inwardly and outwardly. This is where I must forego the fullness and bring depth to the lesson over an extended period of time. Along with that I try, above all, to activate the secondary senses; otherwise chaos may take over. The excess of sense impressions at home (TV, videos, street noise, and so forth) requires a strong “breathing out” as an antidote which means a coming-to-rest. The ether currents in the whole body must be enabled to flow for education to take place.

*TS: How is the situation with the children themselves?*

GK: There is a reason why this particular school district was declared a disaster area. With almost a total foreign population here, the children come from the most difficult social conditions. The teaching begins with all of us first having breakfast together. I prefer to pay for that out of my own resources rather than watch the children “breakfast” solely on colas, Red Bull© and other such things. In most cases both parents are working. As a rule, the children are not cared for enough, so that in the first grade they often have a soul development deficiency of three to four years.

*TS: How is it with the potential for violence – is it really as bad as the media reports?*

GK: Worse! The parents are always under pressure to achieve more. By means of signed leasing contracts they live beyond their means. They do not get enough sleep and they eat irregularly. Under these tensions they lose patience and frequently hit and otherwise abuse the children. We can see the results on their bodies when they dress to swim, for example. But actually, little can be done. Even the professional counselors are helpless. The families merely change to another district of the city when it gets too risky, and start all over again. I don't consider it my job to judge or even call in the police. I am a confidant, the teacher of these children, and have to suffer this powerlessness, too. Only in this way can I give the children a place where at least they can have security during the day along with boundaries and meaning. All the same, the first graders already receive up to twenty-six hours of teaching in a week.



*TS: These dramatic destinies of children are heart-breaking! Is this why you came to the "Angel" theme and why you ask for help from the spiritual world?*

GK: I experience children – and especially the children here – as unusually open to the spiritual world, for the life of the spirit. For them it is very clear: there are Angels, there are guardian Angels, and by means of the embroidery Angels that are months in the making, the children come into inner conversation with these helping guardian Angels.

*TS: The majority of the children here are Muslim or Hindu; few of them come from a Christian background. Are there no conflicts here?*

GK: Interestingly enough, no! They simply see that there are different names for "God" and "Angel." I once had a strictly fundamental-educated Muslim youth in my class. When I told stories and legends that involved "God," he was allowed to call out: "Allah" right after "God." Actually many of these children are deeply Christian souls (of course, not by confession) who were born in different surroundings, but who came, not accidentally, into a Christian cultural surrounding. Many souls don't have it easy today to incarnate, and it becomes evermore complicated because of contraception and abortion. But they somehow find the way to religious experiences that belong to them and often purposefully seek a living Christianity. Besides, all religious persuasions are taught in the Bible study.

*TS: Is religion such a big subject with these little children?*

GK: It is their number one subject and the biggest subject for conversation – sometimes also for arguing. During lessons the following statements and questions are made: "Now, isn't my grandmother in heaven now?" – "God made the sun, the earth too?" – "Do Angels have teeth?" – "God is always there" – "Where?" – "Around us and in us." – "Uh-oh! I'd better grow or he won't have enough room!"

*TS: How can you handle these questions?*

GK: By questioning the child and then confirming the child's own feelings. The child becomes satisfied. Then the teaching can go on.

*TS: What do you do when there are factions among the parents whose home countries are at war?*



GK: Parents can not do what the children can. That is why I have found a special form of “parent evening.” Four times a year all families with siblings, grandparents and relations come into the school on a Friday evening from 6–7pm. For a half hour the children demonstrate something from their school work. Afterwards I share the school information. In this way enemy nations come peacefully together. The subject is “the children.” During the Gulf War, I could sit with the mothers from enemy nations around a candle. All of us in the circle then shook hands, and when the war was over a Swiss girl donated flowers to replace the candle.

*TS: About your Angel embroideries: The echo of your exhibition was overwhelming! You will probably exhibit next year also at the National Expo 2002 (a large Swiss country exhibit) under the project of the Swiss churches entitled “Un Ange passe.” How did all this begin and how is it embedded in the teaching?*

GK: The children themselves brought me to it ten years ago through the initiative of a young boy: “There was a dead man in front of our door. The police came. Please draw me an Angel; I want to embroider it.” In the school these children have so many lessons of “instruction ” and little time for digestion. In order for the parents to be able to work, blocks were set up with afternoon child care, because the maximum time for lessons for first graders was eighteen hours. So instead we work – usually daily – on these embroidery pictures. The picture’s design is put on burlap with wax crayons and then stretched onto a wooden frame.

The work can then begin with thick embroidery needles and many colors. The children are free to choose the kind of stitches. Since embroidery is not part of the school curriculum at this age level, I have to pay for all the materials myself. Actually I came to this project because I was desperately looking for something meaningful for the children to do on these long school days. Otherwise they often get bored, aggressive, and difficult. With an artistic activity like embroidery they become quiet inwardly, and a very beautiful atmosphere in the classroom is created.

*TS: How do you find the children of today – the new generation – in comparison to earlier ones?*

GK: The children that we have here are very will-oriented; they want to change the world. But because they are often unable to do much, and life is so

difficult, they become impatient, unhappy, even furious. That is will power in the wrong place. We then call them “aggressive.”

### **Anthroposophy – meeting and working together with the children**

*TS: How do you handle being confronted every day with these forces? You said that anthroposophy also helps – how?*

GK: I keep myself focused inwardly on a picture of the Archangel Michael in which he doesn't let his gaze be fastened to the abyss, but rather directs his gaze upward toward the spiritual-divine. The destructive powers that surround the children are powerful. The inner pictures that I try to give them in the fairy tale help them to get over the blocking fears, above all trauma from war and violence. Now the question about anthroposophy – the meeting and working with the children is a path of spiritual schooling. All the elements of the anthroposophical schooling are contained in it, for example the “positivity” exercise. If I criticize and judge a child, then I might as well forget it – the child immediately closes his being from me. Essential to me is to find the reality of the spiritual. Anthroposophy for me is not a schooling structure, but, rather a live being to which I can open myself. Waldorf pedagogy is the instrument for the teaching.

*TS: How do you experience the reality of the Angel in your work?*

GK: One way is through the children. For myself...? Perhaps I could best experience it as a spiritual flash when in moments of trouble, in moments when I no longer know what to do, I grow beyond myself. For instance, a gang of tough youths in leather jackets wanted to “fish out” and beat up a child in my class. I presented myself before them and with two words could send them away. I sensed that this was not “only me.” Also in daily teaching I rely on such spiritual flashes. I always come to school with a large knapsack, packed with food for the children and also full of teaching ideas. What is then essentially right for the children, however, I have to sense out – and then suddenly an inner certainty is instilled within me – and I experience that my Angel helps me. I grasp the reality of the Angel through my studies in anthroposophy, but also through my study of art. Recently the theater play “The Angel” by Silja Walther, sister of the author Otto F. Walther, impressed me very much. Such works with supersensible content are unfortunately not performed often.

## Waldorf schools: pilot schools in the spirit of the times

*TS: Once more back to the Steiner-Waldorf schools: What do you think today, since you know both school systems well, of the Waldorf schools?*

GK: It is, of course, very important that there are Waldorf schools, but they live completely out of the personalities who teach there. The Waldorf schools are pilot schools that live with the spirit of the times. In the process of seeking, mistakes can naturally happen. “Busy hands cannot remain clean.” For every Waldorf school teacher I wish that he or she finds the courage to try out something completely new, as dedicated but imperfect human beings! I would like to free the Waldorf schools from all dogma, fixed ideas, and from the fears of adults.

*TS: I think you address a very important point here. It is certainly essential for the further development of the Waldorf schools that dogmatic impacts disappear. In past years, nevertheless, much has changed in the Waldorf schools and the atmosphere is much more open. Also, in teacher training we try to go new ways. For it is also important to have the coming generation be involved and full of initiative, to go to school without wearing blinders in order to be open and to learn from the children.*

GK: And it is also important that the new teachers don’t have to leave the Waldorf school again because it gets too confining for them. What we practice daily with the children applies also in the College of Teachers. That involves a healthy portion of humor, tolerance, and acceptance in the community as a basis for inner freedom. Student teachers could also get acquainted with such work as we have here, for example. Then they will recognize that Waldorf education can be practiced in different ways and not remain stuck to any one conception. The most important thing is that each one seeks his or her own way; this adds authenticity to the teaching – the children notice it and then try to get involved in the learning.

– Interview was conducted by Thomas Stockli  
from *Das Goetheanum*, No. 51/52/2001

# Angels and Star-Children

An Excursion to Their Workshop

by Thomas Stockli

Translated by Ben and Estelle Emmett

We are sitting in a bus and riding through District 4 of Zurich, Switzerland. I am returning to the schoolhouse for children from around the world. This time the windows are full of stars, falling heavily from the sky: big white snowflakes. With me in the bus is a group of students from Dornach. Expectant, they are looking forward to this visit to an extraordinary Zurich schoolhouse. They have read the interview with Ms. Koller. “We want to visit this teacher and her children!” was the unanimous declaration in the full-time course of the Upper Technical School for Anthroposophical Pedagogy in Dornach.

Soon they sit, a dozen students, in a very ordinary room of the public school and observe the teaching of the teacher. It is an ordinary room, but the teaching is extraordinary, teaching inspired with artistic-life-activity through which the children blend visibly with the teacher into a higher unity. The individual sections of the rhythmical whole are brief, and each child takes part in full of devotion. Afterwards they go to the main room for rhythmic instruction.

The rhythm teacher is also a great educator-artist. She includes us in the teaching. Soon we are jumping around the room hand in hand with the children, full of buoyancy to the beautiful melodies of her piano playing – the student from Angola paired with a child from Kosovo, the student from Petersburg with the boy from Turkey, the student from Iran with a girl from Sri Lanka. On our arrival the children pointed with joy to our student from Africa and yelled loudly, “Africa!” Only the music, movement, and concentration are important.

Later, back in the classroom, the students sit with the children, the atmosphere is focussed; everybody embroiders pictures. I sit next to the delicate blonde girl from Albania. “Do you want to try it too?” she asks. She is happy

with the way I decorate the hem of her Angel with golden stitches – the needle pierces into the dark fabric and then appears again; again it goes into the dark, again it appears in the light. All of the students are sitting with the children or standing with the teacher and all are observing how she helps the children, so that beautiful embroidered pictures grow almost like miracles under their hands. It is a world full of colors, animals, trees and flowers, angels, heaven and earth, legends and memories of life – everything joins together through this artistic activity into a wholeness.

Then comes the noon break with a “pedagogical intensive course”; the children are in the nursery or have gone home, and we sit together for an improvised picnic. For the other Russian students Olga translates everything that Ms. Koller tells from her rich experience so that nothing is lost. During this seminar lesson the students hear an experienced teacher give her profound insights engagingly, spontaneously and with originality. The depth of anthroposophy as a source for teaching becomes comprehensible for the students.

The Iranian student brings up question after question; she wants to know how it goes with the education of Muslim children in a Swiss school. And Ms. Koller answers with seriousness and humor, relates examples of how she, because she studies both sacred books, the Bible and the Koran, often spontaneously tries to solve difficult problems. For example, when a strict Muslim father wanted to forbid his little daughter from taking swimming lessons, Ms. Koller sent him home with: “Ask Allah whether He will save your child if she falls into the water and can’t swim. Tell me tomorrow Allah’s answer.” The next day he was there: “Allah will only save her when she can swim.” “You see – Allah is good.” It is important to include and respect the faith of the parents, she adds. And that is why there is a calendar hanging in the room on which the festivals of all religions are posted – the holy days of the Christians, the Muslims, and the Hindus. (That way she also knows why certain children are absent.)

We look at photo albums and see one of her pupils in the colorful Tamil festival. We look at the beautiful drawings by the children of Christophorus, embroidered pictures of kings, angels, squirrels, sheep, and flowering meadows.

We recall the hopping, singing, colorful throng of children in the morning, and it is suddenly clear to all: the star children are everywhere; they come like wonderful snowflakes to earth, not to specially selected places, but we recognize

that they are here before us in these gray-painted public schools. They are of all skin-colors, speak all the languages of the world, but above all they all speak the language of the heart. Met with intelligent and instructive words from the grownups, the children are nevertheless often distrustful, having already known disappointment frequently in their short lives; they have been strongly shocked by evil, stirred up, wounded and attacked. And yet, their trust in the Earth Star and its inhabitants is unshakable. They seek other warm souls, grownups in whom the Star Child in the manger has become inner experience and life goal.

A wish is expressed that all of these millions and millions of Star Children throughout the world will find grownups who will understand them, who have compassion for them and stand up for them like this teacher in an ordinary, but so extraordinary school... for is not every child a Star Child?

Back home I recollected the poem by Rudolf Meyer which he, in Advent mood, dedicated to the arriving Star Souls:

O consoling flake – you talk of manger-joy.  
 The Virgin muses;  
 for silver laughing nears ...  
 Crystal Heaven, open up and send to Earth the Star Souls.

## **The technique**

The original drawing is transferred with wax crayon onto burlap and then stretched over a wooden frame. Then work then begins with thick, large needles and many colors. The types of stitches are free choice. Each child works daily at it for about twenty minutes. It is completed in about half a year. Each picture has its story, like each child. The works are not intended for sale.

## **How did the Angel pictures begin?**

For thirteen years I attempted with my class to live Waldorf education. Our foreign child quota is about one hundred percent. The school district declared us to be a disaster zone. One aspect of this work is challenging, but on the other hand rewarding.

The first graders attend school up to seven hours daily, and they tend to fight when they are tired. So we began to embroider: animals, humans, and

dwarves were some of the subjects. Sometime in between, the first Angel picture was created. Subsequently, many more were created. I wanted to build bridges between cultures, religions, nationalities, Swiss and foreigners, children and adults, between people who deny the Spirit and the ones who seek Him.

We have received many enthusiastic responses. If the Angel pictures could contribute to the intensity of the form-giving element, I would be delighted. The Swiss churches at the EXPO 2002 showed these works under the name of “Un Ange Passe” (An Angel Is Passing).

## Monday morning

(The school grounds had been rented out for weekend entertainment.)  
Watch out for Monday morning – a fiery surprise – a glistening white sheet of light on the surface of a lake. Courage, strength are needed.

Red Bull® cans are lying around the school yard, Alco Pop bottles are in the trash cans. In the school’s entry hall a sweetish smell wafts toward you. It is a scene like after a bomb attack. Black cloths are hanging around like dead birds. Fortunately, the laser sphere and music boxes are already gone.

You should have known this – have you already forgotten Friday evening? An innocent little finger pushes on one of those tempting plastic knobs and the hell-machine blasts forth. Small children fled in panic, are not to be found. You yourself take flight. There is no way to start work. The school yard is crowded with children asking: “When does the TEKKNO Party start?” “I don’t know. But surely this is not something of interest for you?” Their glances indicate: Aren’t you naïve!

In the restaurant at the corner of the street sits the manager, the initiator of the weekend parties. “A child started the music.” He only nods. “A bright morning without sorrows follows the dark night!”

Gather the trash, clean up, air out. The school bell rings. There they are already, full of expectation. Please, no long ceremony! They push forward into action; just don’t ask about the weekend – there would be no end with the garbage. Time is precious; I have ten minutes to introduce something new for the day. Thereafter, breathe out, breathe out!



On the next weekend: Red Bull © with whiskey, \$7.00. Hoopeh Hooge© \$5.00. I wish this story were not true!

### **How can one know when it is eight o'clock?**

What a silly question! One looks at the clock. Clear? Clear! At this my story should end – a short story. Let me tell you the reality.

School starts at eight o'clock. All children are there. One of these three sentences is the right one – which one? Mark it! Did you mark the last one? Then you were good. The school cannot start. The children are not there. That's how it goes since summer. Now we have autumn. For a quarter of a year the same game.

One child is there. I already have the telephone list in my hand. "Come. Amed, we will go and call. Whom do you want to call first?" "Nasi and Lirim." "Tell them in your language that they should come to school immediately. Dial 4-2-1-8-6-3-5." It does not work. Of course not; he still does not know all the numbers. I write them down for him; now he manages.

Amed does not say much, he nods his head and hangs up. Nasim will come and Lirim. Of course, they live in the same house. I keep going. The next call is for Noran. She is Turkish. A sleepy woman's voice keeps saying, "School? School? Noran?" Then just a hum. For Mohamed, the Berber, I conjured up a French sentence. I hear a whiney little voice: "You know I am sick. Mami went to work." "And where is your daddy?" "I don't know." "Take care of yourself. Stay in bed."

I call the Childcare: "Where is Aida?" "We sent her off at eight o'clock." I look out into the recreation area. She sits on a swing. "Amed, go and get her." "And Alexander?" "Oh yes, he had a dentist appointment today." Now it is just Sandra who is missing. Nobody answers the phone. Amed arrives with Aida. We four go to the classroom and meet a crying Sandra in front of the door. "My Mami had to take my little sister to the Kindergarten." Soon afterwards our two Kosovo Albanians, Nasi and Lirim arrive, with empty stomachs. Most children don't eat breakfast. Should I reintroduce our common breakfast?

Today we are lucky, we can start school at 9:15am and can omit the walk around the building. Forty-five minutes are left for work.



Soon will be the parents' visiting day. My little translators explain to their Mamis with serious faces: "School – learn; no school – no learn, no second grade."

I bought twelve alarm clocks at the supermarket. They are cheaper by the dozen. It wasn't the best idea – why? I think: I still have to invest in many things so that these children will learn arithmetic and how to read and write. Equality, same choice for everybody – what does this mean?

## **Escaping the grounds of Zurich**

A few years ago I saw a sign that said: "Escaping the Grounds of Zurich." I did not understand this sign. Who would want to escape this worldly, open, dynamic, beautiful city situated between a lake and the mountains? But one week before Christmas I myself am in this position. I wrack my brain with the question: Where do I go with the small children on the last day of school in the old year? Because this is a Fest – festa (in Albanian), sarecanost (in Serbian), eglence (in Turkish). There is an announcement in the paper to the population:

## **School New Year celebration on Friday, December 21, 2001**

Children and young people will again noisily roam the streets. The following rules are to be applied:

- The festival activities are not to be started before 5am.
- Igniting of fireworks is prohibited.
- Don't put your garbage out before 7am.
- Make sure your bicycle is in the garage.
- Lock your house and garden gates.
- Parents are, besides taking care of their children and young people, also responsible for damage after law ZG 13333.

The non-acquainted might ask: Is there a tornado expected or perhaps a terror attack or war? Already two weeks before the countdown, quite frustrated and ready to throw myself together with my first graders into the tohuwabohu, the Madonna with the protective cape appears to me. Smiling mildly in her blue cloak sprinkled with thousands of stars, she enwraps countless figures, only their heads visible. Her protégés look with satisfaction, calmly but also somewhat curiously, out into the world. The Madonna doesn't stand still, no, she continues

to move on. I go with her. Where is she going to lead me? But yes, of course, to the stable! The ox warms the baby's feet with its breath. The donkey nudges the ox closer to the newborn. The mouse brings a golden kernel of wheat. The spider weaves a net out of the rays of light. The dog jumps around the cradle and barks joyously. I have it – we have to go again to see Arco. Last year he was the sweetheart of all the third graders on the farm. A date is set quickly: "You can come at 3 am." "Well that is a little too early. Would 9am be all right?" My sweet little ones are not enthused at all. They want to go to disco!

During a pause I have a problem. Now, one day before, I don't know how to protect my little ones. During the intermission I spot the girls from the sixth grade with a stuffed cat. "What do you have there?" "This is Felix for the French lesson." "Oh, I need him. Would you lend him to me for an hour?" "All right, but we want him back!"

Felix lies flat on the classroom floor. "What is the matter with Busi (the cat)?" the children ask. "Well, you know, this is Felix; he is French. Il est triste. Il a une probleme." "What is his problem?" The children gather around Felix; they are full of sympathy. "Felix wants to visit his best friend. His name is Arco. He is an old shepherd dog. He lives on the farm. Felix hasn't seen him for a long time." "Well, let him go." "He is not allowed to." "Let him go. We will all go with him." And the mouse, also a stuffed one, goes with us, too. All of us run to the sixth grade teacher. She doesn't understand, but the main thing is we are allowed to keep Felix until tomorrow. He is put to bed, together with the mouse so that they both can have a good night's sleep.

Next morning tired and worn out, as if pulled out of the water and hungry, the little ones tumble to school. They immediately spot Felix and the mouse peeking out of the knapsack. It is snowing and cold. On the way to the farm there is a lot to see: windows sprayed with shaving soap, cars enwrapped in toilet paper, blackened teeth of the beauties on the billboards, dumped-out waste-paper baskets, trampled bicycles; in the bus afterwards the free newspaper issues with the burning towers – a review of the year already now? I collect all the flyers. "When you can read, you can have them." And I hear disappointment from children and adults.

We arrive. Felix and the mouse are allowed out of the backpack. "Where is Arco?" "Arco was old; he died last year," the farmer states. Felix is sad; all

the children want to console him. Now all we need is breakfast. We unpack the backpack to find bread, cheese, nuts, and mandarins. Finally, off to the animals. Scared by the loud noise of the children, the calves hide themselves in the outermost corner of the corral. Serkan lures them with his self-composed recitative chant: "Dear animals, come to me." All the children chime in. The animals allow themselves to be petted.

We light a candle in the horse stable, sing, and dance. For a moment there appears to be a Christmas mood. It is so cold that we can see the steam of our breath. The head of a horse nosily peeks through a moveable window. Each child is allowed to distribute hay with a flat hand. Most of them are scared by the large teeth of the horse but are surprised how soft his nostrils feel and how the horse likes to be petted. As they do it they feel the warm breath of the animal. The food for the cows is already there; the children are very busy. "None of them has a telephone wire to God; they don't have any horns," a boy from Kosovo calls out indignantly.

The bull fascinates everybody. They want to goad him, but nothing disturbs his equanimity. So they just put his feed in front of him. There is big excitement with the pigs at the outside corral. All animals want to greet the children. My Muslims pinch their noses but give up their antipathy soon and find the animals quite adorable. Mehmet says: "At home I will go under the shower and soap my whole body." "Why that?" "Because of the pigs." Mehmet is a Turk.

On the way home the children assess the animals: cows, a horse, many pigs, and Zorro. "Do you mean Toro (the bull)?" "No, no, Zorro." "What does he look like?" "He has a black mask." "How many legs?" "Two." "Is he a human being or an animal?" "An animal." I am surprised. Well, maybe they are right.

As we part, some of the children ask if there will be school in the afternoon. "No, we are on vacation." They depart somewhat disappointed. "This is not a vacation. This is God's punishment," I say outloud to my colleague, and then we laugh. The worst day of the year has been mastered!

The next day there is a headline in the paper: "An explosive night!" The newest hit was to blow up parking meters. The police received eighty complaints. Trash containers were set on fire and put into the streets. At a bus stop the glass windows had been smashed and bicycles had been put on fire. There

was considerable damage. The principal of the school district writes: "Are you surprised that many people call the year's end celebration the high point of the outgoing year?"

### **Draw me and Angel**

Everybody knows Paul (the name is a pseudonym). He is eight years old. The children at the school grounds are afraid of him: "Tomorrow you will bring me twenty dollars. If you don't, I will hit you." Paul is strong. The woman at the newspaper stand wonders, the only food he buys is Coca-Cola and ice cream. This is his breakfast. He always pays with paper money. The father informs the teacher: This is my only son and heir. He has to become somebody. The seven sisters are not mentioned.

The mother takes care of the ten family members. What she cooks for lunch usually is not appreciated by Paul. He prefers to eat in a restaurant. The seven sisters adore him; they spoil him and serve him. The school dentist can not handle him. Paul does not open his mouth. He is afraid. "When all his teeth are rotten and he is in much pain, send him to me as an emergency case. Then we will extract all his teeth under anesthesia." The teacher thinks she doesn't hear right. She has more or less of a relationship with him. Paul is his own master – working material and homework do not exist for him.

On the last day before vacation the boy comes to school pale-faced and troubled. "A dead man is in front of our door; the police are in our apartment. My father is on the phone all the time. Draw me a protective Angel!" "There is a sheet for you – why don't you draw your Angel yourself!" He is finished in a moment. My God! This Angel needs salvation – it is a bodyguard with broken wings!

In the following months Paul works overtime; he is embroidering his Angel. There is a dialogue between the boy and the Angel. The teacher is allowed to provide some help for him in his work. The Angel becomes ever lighter and less heavy. He becomes a flower Angel, hovering between heaven and earth. He has eyes of light on his wings. His heart is a shining cross. Paul keeps on embroidering at home. None of his sisters is allowed to touch his work.

Two years pass and Paul is in a different class. His Angel is displayed in a major exhibit. Paul walks all alone through the big city; he wants to see his Angel. He is proud of him. The day after the exhibit he is the first to retrieve his Angel. He needs him.

At Easter, 2003, Samuel calls me: “I was in your class ten years ago.”

“But I never had a Samuel in my class. Who are you?”

“I am Paul. I changed my first and last names. I am now called Samuel Kuster.” Well, that is some news! “I am here with my wife and am looking for the Catholic church. We want to see the Angel exhibit there and I want to show my wife my Angel.” After I give him directions to get there, he gives me his address and we agree to meet. I am thoughtful through the whole evening: Paul-Samuel – one who follows his Angel!

(At this moment I have seventeen Angels in the St. Francis Church of Zurich – an exhibit the Catholic priest has asked to display from Easter until Pentecost. I am very happy about it!)

## **You ask too much**

The first encounter: “Hello. This is Henry. I am his mother. I will be back at 6pm. Bye-bye!”

Before I could scratch together my miserable school English – I ask myself: Why did I not pay better attention at school – the black woman has disappeared. Henry remains. Say, that does not work! School already started ten minutes ago. We are in the middle of our morning song. The week starts well! The children are interested. “No, Henry is not made out of chocolate. Leave this. Don’t lick.”

The boy rolls his eyes until the whites show ... all the chairs are too small for him, as well as the tables. Maybe he does not even belong in first grade? Maybe he is a third grader? Surely! Finally, at noon, a good soul at the daycare feels compassionate: “But only today, for lunch.” “And then?” “This is not my affair! Call the daycare coordinator.” I am free until evening.

In the teacher’s lounge I find a note in my box: “Henry, eight years old, from Ghana.” However, today I had not picked up my mail! Finally, between 5 and 6pm the mother appears. “This is the telephone number of the daycare. Bye-bye.”

Next morning I have the paper work. Henry is asthmatic. “Do you need an inhaler?” “Yes.” “Please bring it.” After Henry survives an attack without the inhaler, he brings it. Daily occurrences. Daily!

Henry got a place in the daycare. The road to get there is far. There are many opportunities to tarry, for instance at the newspaper stand. I get acquainted with his father. We have a teacher-parent conversation. The mother is the same person, but the father? I don’t know. Are my eyes that bad? “You are not the same person. What is your name?” This scenario is repeated.

Each time a different man is the father! Upon my request to make a drawing of the family, I get different pictures. The number of family members changes from five to nine!

My home visit: after he has been missing for a few days, I ring the bell at Henry’s house. I shouldn’t have done this! A huge man opens the door: “What do you want?” “I am Henry’s teacher.” “Come in, sit down!” The giant of a man stands there in front of me; the room is filled with people. Everyone speaks at once. I don’t understand a word. Henry is fetched and confirms that I am his teacher. The girl with the baby is his sister; no, she does not go to school. She is twelve years old – one of those “hidden children.” The situation becomes critical when I ask for Henry’s parents. “You ask too much!” I am put outside with threatening gestures.

I look into Henry’s school bag. In the parent’s notebook I find a scrap of paper with the following account:

I gave him:

April	1,000.00	
June	500.00	
Sept.	2,000.00	etc.

You ask too much. It is better not to know. Father and mother are jobless.

The story of the White Princess fascinates Henry. The seven-headed dragon wants to marry her. Because she refuses him she is captured in the dark tower and is forced to go without water and bread. But the white dove brings bread and wine; the sun brings light and warmth; the roses protect her from evil. Henry

makes a drawing of the picture and wants to embroider it. I advise that it is much too complicated, but he works at it for an entire year. In spite of great difficulties the task is accomplished.

“Where do you go for the holidays?” the children ask each other. Henry is going to Istanbul, Amsterdam, and Frankfurt – and all this in two weeks! After this trip, his jacket has little cuts in the lining. He remembers only small white bags inside. Now he gets a new jacket. At the next vacation time it is the same story. The school doctor is notified. She wants to report the information, but somehow nothing happens – everything gets stuck. At school Henry’s head rests often on the table. He sleeps. I ask at the pharmacy what kind of medication he gets. He has two prescriptions for cough syrup from two different doctors. Henry drinks the syrup from the bottle. Codeine makes you sleepy.

Years have gone by and Henry is with a different teacher. Sometimes he visits me. His older sister went to school after all. She is now a cashier at a department store. The last father remained the same. Henry got a little brother and sister. I think of him often.

## **The way out of darkness into the light**

“I’m having a baby, I’m having a baby – at Christmas time!” Armin hops about the room singing. He is nine years old and since summer has been in the third grade with a new teacher in another school building. But he declared Thursday afternoon as a visiting day. Now he is with us and sits in his old place. That is how it is.

We met each other in spring a year and a half ago in a streetcar. You said, “I know you.” I did not understand you, for how can someone without teeth be understood? Your father, irritated a little, explained to me: he said, “You are a teacher; I want him to be in school with you.” In the summer I received the new first and second graders. You were the last one. You came up to me and clung, beaming, around my neck. Your mother smiled in embarrassment. I had an uncertain feeling: will we make it? But you have chosen me. Now I have you literally around my neck.

I was to visit the parents and bit-by-bit I learned a few facts. I must never ask questions. And yet, over time trust grows and friendship develops. Piece-



by-piece painful experiences come to light. This family is Bosnian-Muslim. The father was an officer in the Bosnian army, consisting of Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, and Croats. For months he was interned in the Srebrenica concentration camp. During this time the mother had hidden her two year- old from the Serbs in a clothes closet.

When the boy came into the first grade, he needed help to walk. He had a fear of stairs bordering on panic. He had no teeth; he couldn't talk. He rejected all contact; if someone approached him, he screamed. A lot of devoted work was needed. I wanted to help this child. I reminded myself of the life of Kaspar Hauser.

Situations like this are not always easy for classmates. His classmate, Paul, complains: "Yesterday he painted the fire red; the day before he ran down the stairs; and today" – Paul's voice trembles indignantly and his eyes shine white in his black face – "today he screamed and wanted to beat me up!" "Leave him be; this is quite normal," I cautioned. That was not what Paul wanted to hear. He turned around and stomped away. Why doesn't his teacher understand anything?

Tomorrow he will turn up at the football field and try to play football. Then, one day, he will be the first to know the result of his figuring; and he will be correct. With his self-styled jumping rope he will seilgumpe in the spring like all the others. What in the world is happening?

I decided not to tell the other children his history, otherwise he would be labeled a "special case." By allowing normal development patterns he will have a chance to become a normal rascal and it is good that way. Basta!

As time moves along his steps of progress no longer elicit resentment or astonishment, but rather call forth joy and encouragement. The children wait expectantly to see what he will conquer next.

With gratitude I look back at the progress with this child. When his incisors appeared there was a celebration – I knew that we would make it. Parents, teachers, and classmates were allowed to help with this "second birth"; healthy walking, healthy talking, healthy thinking finally became possible. This is a true victory of the Light over the darkness!



## Photography time – or, who is the culprit?

There is a terrible noise in front of the classroom. I go to open the door. I face an excited group of rowdies. They all talk at the same time, not one of them speaks German. One boy pushes forward: “He is there; let him come in; then, we’ll steal the bike.” They come dangerously close. I hear: “Bicycle stolen, stomped on.” A cold terror seizes me. Then I grab for the sword of light. I am the commander– these are my troops. With a big gesture I point in the direction of the stairs. “I don’t need you.” The miracle happens – they leave. None of them looks back. I turn the key inside the classroom with the speed of lightning. Thank you, God, for that presence of mind! I take a deep breath. The sight that presents itself to me is overwhelming. “Photo time” passes through my thoughts. Everybody sits quietly and stares ahead of them. It was never quieter! Don’t I have wonderful children? I will give the photographer I just became acquainted with a valuable hint, come and see me at school! You can spare yourself a journey around the world. She wants to sponsor an exhibition of children’s photos.

But what I hear from these beautiful children is simply criminal! For a long time they “find” (i.e., steal) bicycles, take them apart, sell, trade or give away parts and smash the remains with their feet. They all know about it, but nobody admits to being present. Manuel is supposed to be their leader. He sits in his chair, arms crossed, and looks around unbelievably. I think, “What? Manuel? The little Portuguese with Pampers in his pocket? That cannot be true.” “Manuel, is this true?” A barely audible, lovely little voice answers, “We just wanted to play.”

My final word is short but clear: “You will never do this again. Otherwise I will let the mean boys in and they will beat you all up.” After this we paint the Angel Michael. They all know him, especially the dragon. The paintings turn into radiant, strong pictures. I never again heard anything about stolen bicycles.

## The day the dog got out

Today the dog got out. He is wicked. He flies across the sky and spits fire. He has torn his leash.

Kelmend tells me this story with wide open eyes before class begins. There is nothing to be done, he wants to embroider it. I am not enthused. Summer

vacation starts in two days, everything is complete and in order, all children are assigned to their future classes – and now this challenge!

“That will not work. Your embroidered picture is finished – it is a lighthouse, cottage, meadow, the ocean, clouds, birds and the rainbow. It is all there. There is no more room.” “Then take away the light from the lighthouse.” Kelmend slowly becomes impatient. I give in; time is pressing, but sometimes there are more important things than arithmetic and reading. I assign the work for the remaining class, take the scissors and remove a cloud, flying birds and the light of the lighthouse, according to Kelmend’s directions. Now a space as big as a hand is available. “That’s how big your dog is allowed to be.” Five minutes later the dog is there, a dangerous beast! Kelmend copies the picture onto jute and, before I am aware of it, he is already embroidering. “Today I will stay all day and also tomorrow, until he is finished. The dog eats the pirates that want to steal the sheep and who had sunk gold into the ocean. He does not attack the rescue boat; the life belt dangles on the mast.”

This last week Kelmend’s mother came to see me and told me the following: “We received a deportation order; in a month we will go to Kosovo. I have four children. Kelmend is eight years old and is the eldest. You know, I want to protect my children. I am divorced. My husband is marrying a woman from the ‘red light’ district. The divorce will cost \$4,000. He is a bad man!” I don’t think this is true. “I am going to marry an old man who is in a wheelchair. You know, I want to help my children. We will move in with him. This is my new address.” “How old are you?” “Twenty-four.” She is fighting back the tears. Her voice gets louder and angrier: “He is fifty-six.” “Does Kelmend know all this?” “No, not yet. He doesn’t know him yet.” This woman is strong. I never would have been able to do this at the age of twenty-four! “I hope everything goes well for you.” “Certainly the lawyer is expensive.” There is nothing more to say. I feel helpless and sick. “When will you tell him?”

The dog is out. Kelmend knows everything. I admire you, woman; you are courageous. Thank you for your trust. I admire you, child; your creative imagination will help you.

Half a year has gone by and I am trying to reach Kelmend. The telephone service has been cut off.

## The World Trade Center in our classroom

This morning the little hands of the first graders at the door to the classroom hold the newspaper toward me. No greeting, no look, only this: "Look there!" Their faces are of old men and women, but a spark of expectancy flashes. Unlocking the door I curse to myself– how many times must we experience the brutality of the whole television culture. "All right, go in." I have to go through it; there is no way around it.

My single Christian child runs around the room and yells: "Bandits, bandits, bandits!" "Light a candle so you can have light." Contraction and expansion– a candle burns.

The children tell about the destruction of the World Trade Towers in New York City. Each one has seen pictures on the television of the horror, far into the previous night. "Like in Kosovo. That is war." They don't let themselves be driven from the abyss – two of them paint the city. The airplanes fly past; the people laugh; the children play; the dogs bark– a peaceful world.

In this busy silence someone calls: "Hey, we are painting an Angel" Everyone looks at Ali. He is the first grader. "Yes," they all call, "But where?" "Children, the pictures are finished. It is five to twelve." "Can't you see we aren't finished?" That was for me. "All right then, it is too late now. But I promise you can do them tomorrow." Ali is not to be stopped. "There, between the towers, there is room for it." He paints the Angel, a tree and beneath it a baby. "The Angel watches the baby, that nothing falls on it."

In the evening, as I review the day, I stop at the tree. Why is it between the Towers? Then I understand – Ali's father, cutting trees, was killed by a falling tree. For three days and nights Ali and his brothers held the wake; then all three buried their father. Ali was only three years old at the time.

The next morning there are an additional six pupils at the door – their teacher is sick. My little ones remind me of my promise: "Now we will paint the Angel." Unbelievable amazement spreads over the faces of the six new children. Is the teacher crazy or what is wrong here? Hesitation and uncertainty on my part. "I did not promise you. You may do it or not. Every Angel is correct – you cannot go wrong with it!" "Let's do it."

After recess we build the World Trade Center with large building blocks. The proud builders pose before it for a photo. "We're building a new city. It will be a most beautiful one."

Paul Hindemith: *Children's Cantata*

## Child

Tonight my telephone will remain plugged in. You wish to call me, from the bus, with your own cell phone. It is going to be a long journey to Kosovo; take along warm clothing. It is cold there! "Yes, I know, there is snow on the ground. My father will get warm clothing today for all of us. The baby will go with us too." Child!

Today you called me three times. You were excited and told me all your worries. "Another child has beaten me up. Now– how do you say it – I have a hurt on my head." "Are you bleeding?" "Not anymore. Can I come to your class? My teacher is a mean one..."

That's how the conversation went. In between, you were crying. I tried to calm you. We talked for a whole hour. When your father sees the telephone bill there will be an outburst! You were, however, not to be stopped. At the same time I got a lecture from you on modern telephone conversation. At first there was a cordless telephone; then in the street with a deafening traffic background noise and then a quiet, normal plug-in telephone. Then suddenly: "Bye, bye. Mother just came in. I have to cook spaghetti and take care of the baby." End... a humming sound... Child!

I fear for you. You are temperamental. You see a lot. You hear a lot. You talk a lot. You naïvely speak the truth. The truth can be deadly– especially during a war. There was war in Kosovo; there will be more war in Kosovo; there is winter in between. The UCK soldiers need weapons in spring. Weapons cost money– lots of money. Hopefully the Serbs won't rob you! What do they do with children who have money– lots of money? Our boss received hundreds of vacation applications this Christmas. There had never been that many– most of them from Kosovo families. All have been approved. Child!

You painted me your Angel. She is beautiful. About her you say: "She laughs in heaven. She has received many stars on her dress from God. She does not

have any on her arm— she did not always do everything right. I say to her: “Do everything right this time. It is important.” This child is nine years old. Her whole life is ahead of her.

### **What does a thousand dollar bill look like?**

What does a thousand dollar bill look like? I don’t know. The lady at the post office window doesn’t know either. The clerk at the bank has to think about it. Aren’t there two heads on that bill? I haven’t had one in my hands for quite awhile. But, Manuel knows it: a one, a zero, another zero and another one. Right. And what else? I think: “Max and Moritz”— two well-known comic characters from German literature. Maybe! This story tells how this bill came into the hands of this child and into his sight.

It is a wonderful spring afternoon in the teacher’s lounge. It is break. Just one more hour today, then— outside! One has to take advantage of the sun after the long, dark winter. Someone knocks at the door. The baker woman from around the corner and a man enter. “Who here is in charge of the little ones— first and second grade?” “Yes, that’s me. How can I help you?” The man approaches me. “May I take a look into your classroom?” “What has happened?” We go to the door. The baker woman tells me, “This morning a little boy came in and wanted to buy a chocolate Easter egg with a thousand dollar bill.” “How good that your wife acted spontaneously!” I say to the man. Then the strange man shows me his identification card— police. Oh, my!

A glance into the classroom suffices. “This one,” says the baker woman. “I know you, you have often been with us,” says the police officer. “May I take him along?” The three of them walk out. Next morning I take the boy aside: “Well, Manuel, how did it go?” “I found this scrap of paper on the kitchen floor. You know, when my uncle from Portugal comes, these paper scraps sometimes fall out of his pockets. He is a police officer, you know.” What a story. “And the policeman yesterday, was he nice towards you?” “Well, you know, I have been there often—we know each other.”

My world is turned upside-down. In the first grade we learn about a one with one zero, meaning ten. Should we get to three zeros after all? In the summer his family surprisingly returns to their homeland.

## Prenatal diagnosis

### Summer

Excited, Asije shows me a photo: “This is my brother Ali.” “Where?” I cannot recognize anything.” “But yes, Mami is going to have a baby. That’s it.” “And if it is going to be a girl?” “No, the doctor has said it will be a boy.” Asije shows the photo proudly to the other children. I am irritated: somehow I don’t like the story.

A few days later Asije’s father is on the phone: “I will have a son. Then we won’t need Asije anymore. Next Saturday she will fly to Turkey. There she will go to first grade. Her grandparents feel so lonely.” “Listen, that won’t work. Come see me at school. We need to talk about it. Asije feels so much at home here.” “You don’t have to tell me anything; I am her father.” “Just don’t bring her back. I will not allow her to return to the class.” Period. Done.

I feel angry and helpless and I write a memorandum to my supervisor.

As I do this, I read in the accompanying papers: schooling last year in Turkey did not work because the child was constantly crying and wanted to be with her parents. After seven weeks her father brought the child back.

In the final days before her departure Asije is devastated. She says goodbye to her classmates. She will fly alone to Turkey, abandoned.

### Autumn

Today it is foggy. The dark season begins. It is difficult for the children from the southern countries. There is no sun, no warmth, no playing outside. I tell them the story about St. Nicholas. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. All yell: “That’s him, St. Nicholas!” But it is a much greater surprise: Asije and her father stand there. Her arm is in a cast. She walks over to her still empty seat as a matter of course. The children accept it as quite normal. Asije is beaming.

Her father is afraid— there is sweat on his forehead. He probably remembers my threatening remark from the past— I remember it too! “Asije was in a car accident with her grandparents ... no one else was hurt. She has to go to the doctor here.” “And then?” He shrugs.

Asije's St. Nicholas picture is the most beautiful one. "Come donkey," says Nicholas, "We will go to the children." "This picture will not enter my house: St. Nicholas is a Christian and we are Muslims," says her father. Asije is in pain. She has to go often to the doctor and the physical therapist. The formerly happy child has turned into a heap of misery. She clings to me.

Her achievements are poor. Of course ... she has missed so much. Poor child!

## Spring

It took Asije half a year to become stabilized again. She never lived with her grandparents, but stayed with strangers. There was never a car accident either. All this I learn, bit-by-bit, from the child. She is not able to tell me what really happened.

When her father wanted to forbid her from taking swimming lessons for religious reasons, I sent him home. "Ask Allah if he will rescue your child when she falls into the water and is unable to swim. Tell me tomorrow Allah's answer." Next day he simply stands there: "Allah will rescue her only when she knows how to swim." "See, Allah is good." Many family members go on a pilgrim's voyage to Mecca. Meanwhile an aunt takes care of all the children. Afterwards, the father forbids the child to sing at school. Meanwhile I have been reading the Koran. I am fighting for the rights of his child. Asije will stay here anyway. Why? The parents need a nanny for Ali.

## Mejreme

You have written so many letters to me since you began with a new teacher in the second grade. "I love you. Do you love me too? May I visit you? Here is my telephone number. Call me." "Yes, my little dove, I will write to you. Your last letter contained three things: a postcard of an old, arched bridge, a drawing of both of us, and your photo entitled: "When I was still little."

Mejreme, your hand is red and filled with blisters. "Who has done this? What is his name?" You shake your head ... you don't know him. The next day you say: "I will never tell you." At first you lied. Your hand was supposedly squeezed in the door. I didn't believe you. This injury was caused by fire. Go and



put your hand under flowing water. I run to the elevator crying: "Who has done such a thing?" I leave the class in the care of a colleague. We run to the doctor. We both need Bach's Rescue Remedy®. You ask: "Do you hurt, too?" "Yes, yes!" The tears are running down my face.

Finally at the doctor's— this is an emergency case. He is an old, experienced doctor who has seen a lot. I see shock in his eyes: "Second degree burns. What happened?" No answer. "Here is a prescription for painkiller. Get it from the pharmacy and give it to the child. Send me her father."

We run to the pharmacy. On the way the pain increases and the shock gives way. "A boy wanted to sleep with me." "What did you say?" "I didn't want to. So he held my hand in boiling milk." "Where was your mother?" "She was there too." Where is the Rescue Remedy® ? The bottle is empty. I do something forbidden in front of the pharmacist: "Take this tablet and drink this water."

Next day you are here again. "You were supposed to stay at home." "No, no, I am need to learn." "Who has done this?" "I myself." Now this is a lie. She is right handed. It is the left hand that has been burned. No more questions. I fail miserably on the telephone: "You want to report it?" "Do not do it; we still need you. Think of the story of the 'Brandkugelschreiber'... three people were scorched. That was her brother. He is in the juvenile detention center." (The Brandkugelschreiber looks like a normal pen but spurts flames.)

I send a short report to my supervisor and have difficulty speaking the whole following week. What is there to say? My last try to bring light to this dark story is to confront the father. He talks calmly on his cell-phone in Albanian. I understand. We say goodbye to each other. Mejreme, my little white dove, your hand is healed. I love you.

### **Air – laundry – machinery – representative**

That is what is printed on the small business card he hands me, plus: "United Arabian Emirate" and "Ali" something— I cannot read the name, and there is also a colored emblem. I ask myself: is this is the symbol of the air-laundry company or of the country?

This short, overly trim, dark-skinned gentleman with the shiny portfolio, polished shoes, tie and pin-striped suit represents himself as Ali. He looks like a



bank clerk who has already in the morning taken a dose of “crack” and is drinking Red Bull© every hour. What does he want here?

We just finished our swimming lesson with the first graders. I turn around to adjust the hair dryer so it will not burn the hair of my wet little bunnies. Then I have to take care of missing shoes, golden necklaces, rings, and glasses. He still stands there before me. How did he get into the pool area anyway? Air–Laundry–Machinery– can one wash air?

I am determined to face him: “No interest.” He cannot be dismissed. He begins to explain that he is now responsible for Martin. He is a friend of Martin’s mother. She is abroad for a certain time to sell houses. I call Martin: “Come here, will you?” He comes, naked and crying. “What is the matter? Where is your underwear?” The other children explain: “He had forgotten his swimsuit and went into the water in his underwear.” “Oh, I see, wait a second.” I grab my swim bag and a dry pair of underwear is soon found. “Now Martin, do you know this gentleman?” The child stares at the floor. The child has been with us for a week and has never yet spoken. I am not quite sure if he understands or is simply shy or perhaps something else might be wrong. This morning I met Viviane at the bus station. She had taken care of Martin last week and informed me that she will now go to the University of Muenster. She did not know who was to take care of Martin now. Is it now going to be this polished Arab? “Martin, get dressed; we will wait for you.” This man called Ali wants information on Martin’s achievements. He gripes about the mother. He wants to see the curriculum. He hands me his business card. Martin goes with him suddenly but willingly, holding his hand. Was this a clever abduction and will I have to face a judge at some point, or is his life now destined?

I call Martin that evening. Thank God, he is on the phone. Mami and Ali are not there. Now she is selling houses; a week ago she sold gold. On the first day of school she had the appearance of a model, running through the school building, screaming and yelling, dragging a reluctant little boy behind her like a sack of potatoes. Was it Spanish or Portuguese that she spoke? She pushed the classroom door open and tossed the boy inside. A torrent of screaming showered down upon me– luckily I did not understand a word. Then, haughtily, she departed.

### **An act of revenge?**

“Look here!” My first graders point excitedly to the floor. There is a puddle under Seinard’s seat. Is this urine? Some children laugh. I distract them. “It’s okay, we will clean up later.” Seinard sits motionless on his chair. He does not understand the commotion. His eyes are listless; he looks ill.

During the break we both clean up. It really is urine. I take the child to the side. “Are you okay? What happened? Are you ill?” The break is short and so is our conversation. “Yesterday I was at the playground. In the toilet, two men grabbed me and gave me a shot in the arm.” Seinard had said nothing about this at home. He looks ill.

I want to file a report against an unknown person. I call six police stations. All of them rebuke me: “Are you the mother? Were you present? Can you prove it? This is not under our jurisdiction. The person responsible is on vacation.” Everywhere I was shaken off. With the seventh call I got hold of a female police officer. She took note of everything and promised to pursue the affair.

A week later she calls me. She had been to the playground. She saw the parents of the child. This is how the story sounds now: Seinard and a friend found a syringe, filled it with water and he injected it into himself. The father comes to school and provides me with this version. I know this pattern well – it is always the child who has to take the blame. Privately I hear that his father had a terrible argument with his co-residents who left for Kosovo that very night. I noticed a long time ago that his father spends a week every month in Kosovo and then comes back with the “flu.” It does not matter. I inform my supervisor. “Don’t be hysterical. The HIV virus is only active in the air for two hours. Any contamination is not very probable.” Nevertheless, I report to the school doctor and ask him for an AIDS test. Three times I have asked both the father and son to come for an appointment. Three times they did not appear... the story sinks into oblivion. The family moves on. I lose track of them, but the child lingers in my mind.

### **The birth of the rejoicing child of light**

The first words: “I am handicapped. I can’t learn!” Today is the first day of school. Before me stands a fast-growing first grader. She speaks perfect German.

Her voice sounds sharp and cold ... my soul revolts. These two sentences should not stand together.

In the following days the clear, direct task that this child has given me takes form in me as an act of will: I will; I must; I can prove that these two statements are wrong. I simply don't believe them. A bitter clash of spirits unfolds between me and the demon. He has clutched the heart of this child. Right from the beginning he wants to stifle all development. Light, yes ... light is needed. Not the cold, sharp, judging light of the head, but enlivening, warming sunlight from the heart. Yes, child, you are truly handicapped, but not in the way you think. The barely perceptible cerebral palsy that – as her mother tells me – happened at birth and shows itself in weakness of coordination and in the grasping of forms is to be overcome by consistent work.

Again and again her devastated look strikes me. And again the hard, judging voice enters the group like a sword. And then her laughing when something goes wrong. The look, the voice, the laugh – these three must be transformed. It is a long, arduous path.

Here and there are seeds, sprouts, little plants to be discovered – these need to be strengthened. A vacation in the Lower Alps at the farm pleases her. She draws a picture for me – deer in the forest. “I want to embroider that.” From day to day the picture takes on life. Earth, meadow, flowers, stones, a small lake, fir trees, a little bird, butterflies, a fox and a buck, puffy clouds. And then everywhere, sunlight, sun warmth. The last portion of cloth is filled with it. The being of the child brightens; self-confidence grows.

In the second year she wishes to embroider a Madonna. The mother sits on the dark earth, protected by roses. In the middle, at the very end, the jubilant light-child comes into being. Yes, I am here; I am born. In the heart. The roses on the circumference are jubilant too.

Her current teacher reports: Sarah is a cheerful, bright girl. She is one of my best pupils. I am happy to have her in my class.

## **The poor child**

“Where should the poor child sit?” A round woman with a round child stands in the doorway and looks gloomy – without knocking, without greeting.

From the transfer papers I already have reviewed the essential information: Andi is a first grader, better to be schooled in a small class. "The poor child can sit wherever he wishes; every seat is available." "But that, of course, is not possible." "What do you mean?" "We had to take the bus. I'm not going for that." Meanwhile the poor child has found a seat in the front. The class returns from break. The mother asks, "Do you like it here or do you want to go with me immediately?" Before the poor child can open his mouth I say: "The poor child will stay here. He is fine. You can pick him up at noon."

The poor child feels better every day. But I feel worse; a little "know-it- all" has popped into our class. But first, let's get acquainted with the story– it gets even wilder. "My cat has spots; yours is wrong. There are no red cats. I don't feel like doing this now. You do it. I will not go out during break; it is too cold." My colleague laughs: "Ever heard about tyrannical children? Read Irina Prekop." After reading her observations I see everything more clearly. I don't have to wait long for my performance– after the next nagging I thunder: "I am the boss here. You will go out of this door and not enter it again unless you stop this." "Yes, yes," he replies– a barely audible little voice; two shocked eyes; a deadly silent classroom. Well, the first hurdle has been jumped. But with the mother it will take some firmness.

"Now, we just came from Italy ... so that the poor child will get a German education; but you have mainly foreigners in your class. For ten months he was in my tummy. The doctor has said that he will always need much extra love ... and you suggest the after-school-care; he will be unable to play there." The poor child begins to enjoy his new freedom. He does not have to puff himself up like a frog. He likes the aftercare. He even speaks some Italian. But it's slow "letting go," a painful process for his mother.

Andi draws a strong bison with its calf. The little one confronts the mighty father-mother with confidence. It has room for growing. Andi has earned himself a slice of freedom.

Christophorus is a might giant. He has to be painted in four parts. Who will help paint him? Mario, the Italian boy, paints the head and the Christ child. Andi, the German, paints the heart. Carlo, from Peru, paints the legs and Isuf, from Kosovo, the feet. Together we create the new world. There are no foreigners anymore.

## A human being is a human being

“Get up! Immediately! You are a human being, not a dog and not a doormat.” I yell at the boy. He lies in front of the door to the school building. The instreaming children do not notice him. They stumble over him, push forward, step on him. The boy does not move. I pull him up by his arms; thank God he is not injured. “What does this mean? What is the matter with you? Is this supposed to be a joke? Now go on into the classroom.”

I recall this scene in the Children’s Hospital. Spring vacation began an hour ago. I am sitting at Slavko’s bedside; Mehmet sits across from me. I just got acquainted with him five minutes ago. I had asked his teacher to bring him here; assailant and victim should both be confronted. This is no easy task I took upon myself. Neither of the two wishes to talk– let’s leave it at this.

Earlier this morning the police had called: “We have one of the two culprits; he is named Mehmet. He is a Turk and is in the fifth grade with Mr. Meier.”

Mr. Meier has remained outside. I am inside. The teddy bear I brought along lodges in Slavko’s healthy arm. The one that had been trampled on is in a sling. Last night they had put a steel brace on his elbow. Slavko is in pain. Between us lies a big picture book. I tell the story of the shepherd with a thousand sheep. He had lost one and is looking for it. When we get to the part of the story when he found it, the eyes of the two boys begin to shine again. Mehmet reaches out to Slavko’s hand: “I’m sorry! It’s okay.”

Then Slavko’s father stands in the open doorway. With one glance he grasps the situation and looks at me unbelievably. He approaches Mehmet with challenging gestures; I have to gather up all my authority and turn to him: “You leave now, immediately. We are not finished yet. I will come get you.” That works! “Mehmet, I will go now and have a talk with your father and Mr. Meier. See to it that you disappear; wait for Mr. Meier downstairs at the entrance.” When I look into Mehmet’s face, I know that everything will be all right.

At the sport festivities a child with a dangling arm runs with the others– not allowed and not registered. Slavko will be one of the first! The new school year has begun. For two weeks Slavko comes to school either too early or too late or not at all. I call his mother: “I don’t know anything. He does not sleep at home.” “He does not? He is a first grader.” “Slavko, where do you sleep?” An embarrassed

smile. "I want to know it, today I will go with you." It is a big city and is frenetic at five o'clock rush hour. I feel as though I am in a mystery movie. There are only red lights– Linden Place, City Hall Square, Weiherhof Place. Slavko moves as agile as a weasel through both driving and stopped cars. He wants to get rid of me ... from the bus into a streetcar, then back into the bus – where are we? I lose my orientation. At the Brunnenplatz he is suddenly gone. There – I see the door of a house close. Without conscious selection, I press a button. The door opens, then I see an apartment door– he must have entered this one. I ring the bell. An old man opens the door; Slavko stands behind him. The old man is surprised and reluctant. I point to the child: "This is Slavko; I am his teacher. Who are you?" Luckily he understands some German. I am allowed to enter. The room is tiny – a wide bed, a table, a wash basin, three chairs and a huge TV. I notice a woman sitting silently in the corner, and by and by I get the story: "We are Slavko's grandparents. His father, our son, is drinking. He often beats up his wife and children. Slavko reports every day after school to his mother; then he joins us." "You are right, Slavko, I agree." All three are relieved. They invite me for dinner. The grandfather promises to take Slavko to school every day. He will get a children's ticket for the streetcar and the bus.

Years later, I become acquainted with his high school teacher at a conference. Slavko now lives at her place and also goes to school there.



Gudrun Koller was born 1942 in Leverkusen, Germany. She studied to become a primary helper and curative teacher, completed her Waldorf teacher training and studied speech formation. She has been a member of the Anthroposophical Society for twenty-eight years and has been a member of the First Class of Spiritual Science for twenty-two years.

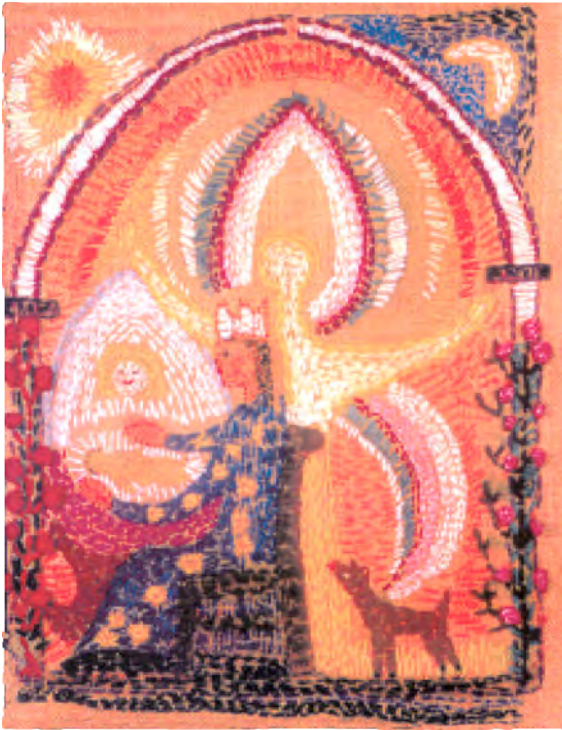


Children from all over the world embroider their pictures. These photographs were taken in a transitional class in the Public School System in County 4, Zurich, Switzerland. The children are six to ten years old.

# Examples of Children's Tapestries

by Gudrun Koller





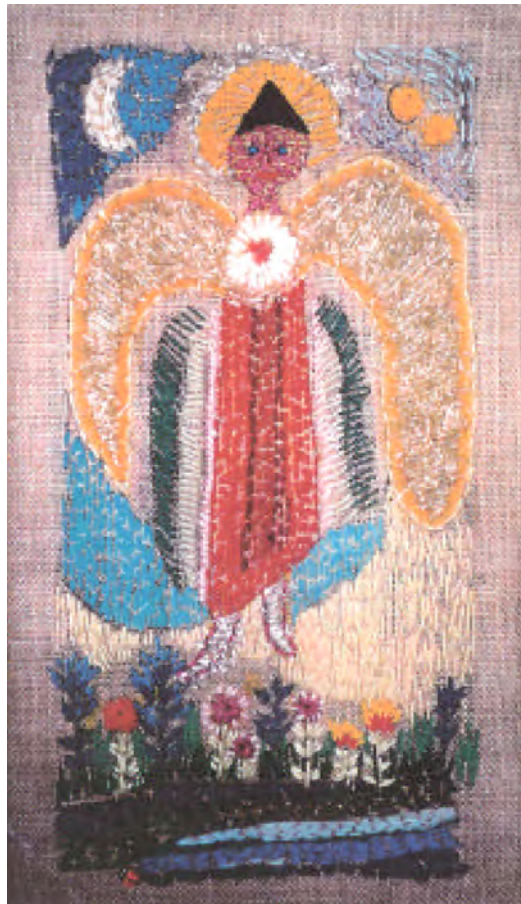
**Zelihe**, Kosovo, 8 years old, 1994

*The Angel Protects*

Zelihe lives with her family in the political asylum home. They have been turned out three times. Much protection is needed.

“The Angel protects the mother.  
The Angel child protects the baby.  
The house protects.  
Sun and moon protect.  
Even the dog helps.”

After many years, when father and child bring the embroidery to the exhibition, he thanks me for my work: “Zelihe learned a lot from you. Now we have immigration papers and we can stay.”



**Faton**, Kosovo, 8 years old, 1997

*Flower-Angel*

My Angel has a sun-heart and mighty  
wings. He takes the light to the flowers.  
He touches them with his shiny legs;  
he does not need arms.



**Manuela**, Italy, 9 years old, 1993

*All Roses and Seven Angels Protect the God-Child*

Manuela's little sister says:  
 "You have to make a bed for the baby; his mother cannot hold him all the time."

We make it.



**Miguel**, Portugal, 8 years old, 1992

*Mary with the Little King*





**Mehmet**, Turkey, 7 years old, 1997

*Michael with the Dragon*

This Angel has four wings – two above and two below.

“When Michael thrusts his sword into the head of the dragon, he gets a second head at his tail.”

The Angel does not look at the dragon.

**Sabrina**, Switzerland, 9 years old, 1995

*Angel-Voyage*

The child is in the dragon ship.

The dragon spits fire.

The Angel gives the child a red rose.

Then it is not afraid anymore.

The stars show the way in the night.





**Paul**, Guadalupe, 8 years old, 1990

*The Face of the Angel Is Invisible*

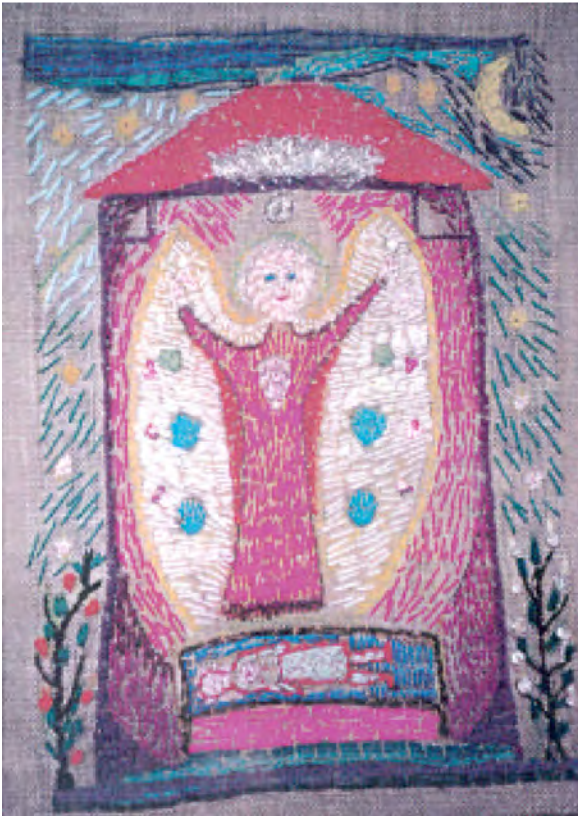
It is too light. The heart is also light.  
The conquered dragon slinks away.



**Angelo**, Italy, 7 years old, 1997

*My Angel*  
has fire in his stomach.  
He is fire.

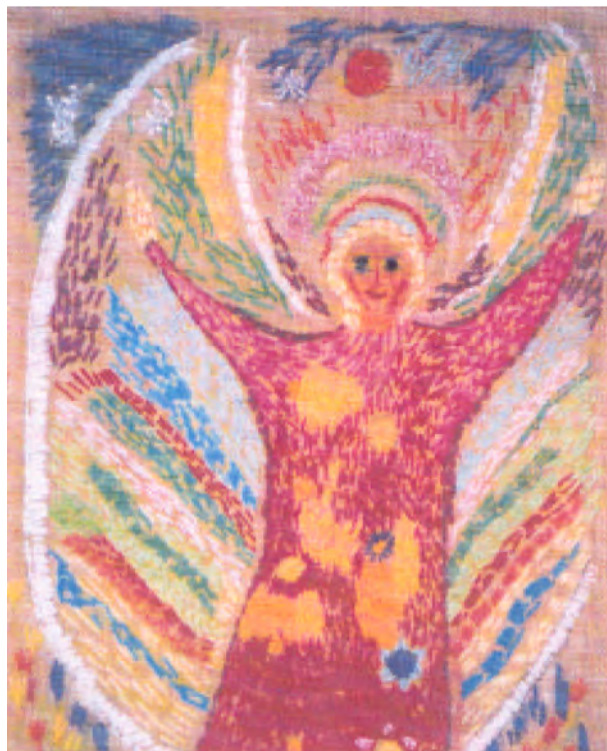




**Daniela** , Portugal, 7 years old  
1998

*My Angel 2*

I went to sleep.  
My Angel watched.  
He looks after me,  
after Mami,  
after the baby.  
I have an Angel-heart.



**Hilal**, Kurdistan, 7 years old  
1998

*Melek (Angel)*

My Angel is pink.  
He has a light heart.  
We don't always.  
He is a street-Angel.  
God asks him:  
"Did you watch well?"



**Ljum**, Kosovo, 7 years old  
1991

*My Angel 3*

This Angel is always in  
heaven with the stars.  
That's why he does not  
need legs and doesn't have  
any arms.

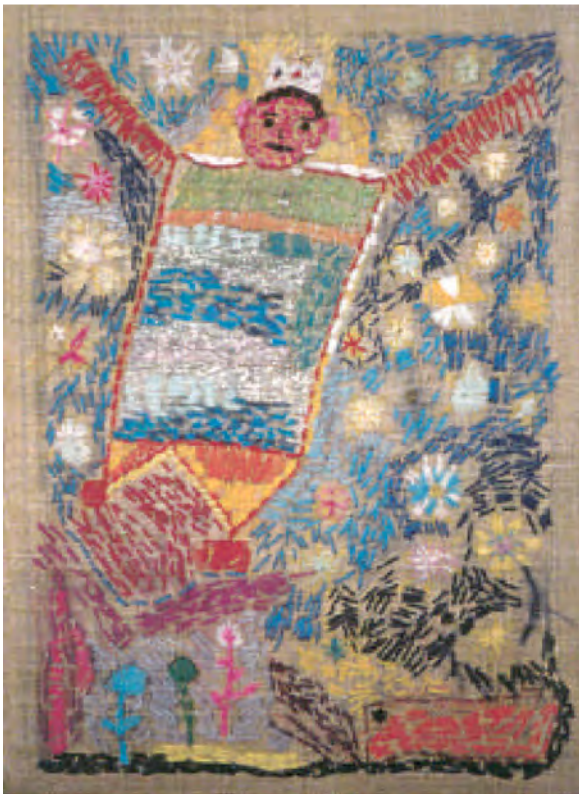
**Ruben**, Spain, 8 years old  
2001

*King-Angel*

He fights the dragon.  
He is not dead yet.  
The Angel flies further on to  
kill other dragons.  
He thrusts his golden sword  
into the mouth of the dragon.







**Hasudin**, Bosnia, 9 years old, 2001

*King-Angel over Bosnia*

Dialog:

*Why does your Angel look so sad?*

Not sad – serious. He sees the war.

*Why does he have such strange legs?*

He got a bomb. Stepped on it – poof! [He stepped on a landmine.]

*Where does he fly?*

Up. He takes the children along.

*The ones that died?*

No. The ones that sleep. He brings them back in the morning.

**Melanie**, Switzerland, 9 years old  
1994

*Mother with Child*

At the beginning of this stitch work, Melanie did not feel well.

She ate little, was skinny and nervous. In her environment, human beings and animals had died. As the cloak of the Madonna grew bigger and bigger, Melanie became stronger and happier. When the picture was completed after a year and a half, Melanie was a new child.



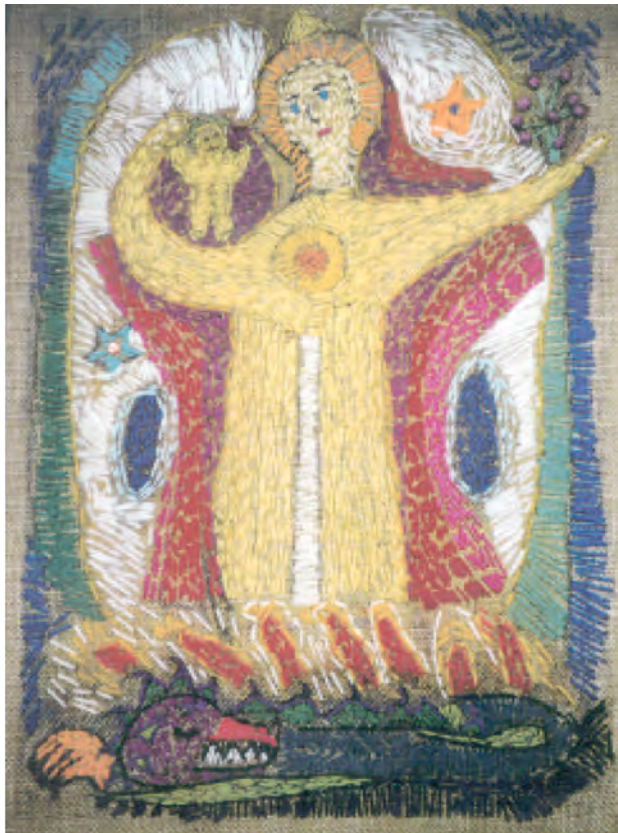


**Sandra** , Switzerland, 9 years old  
1995

*Mary with Child*

The mother sits on the dark earth  
in the protection of the roses.  
At the very end, in the middle,  
the jubilant Light Child comes  
into being.

Yes, I am here. I am born, in  
the heart. The roses in the  
environment are jubilant too.



**Giovanni**, Italy, 8 years old  
2002

*Madonna with Dragon*

The dragon is asleep.  
He has a piece of a star in  
his hand.

He emanates fire.  
But he cannot burn the  
Madonna and Child.  
[Giovanni is a star-indigo  
child – without Ritalin. As he  
stitches, he calms down.]





**Oliver**, Switzerland, 9 years old, 1993

*I Am the Prince*

I have a golden crown and beautiful clothing. I am standing in a flower-meadow. I hold a cross circled with roses into the face of a thunderstorm. Then the Sun appears. [We never talked about holding the cross into the storm.]

This tapestry is how Oliver sees himself after stitching and working with the Angel. He appears now to be a child liberated from anxiety; he is strong and prepared to go on in life. He represents the prototype of all the damaged children who have experienced Gudrun Koller's care and guidance.



Waldorf Publications at the  
Research Institute for Waldorf Education  
38 Main Street  
Chatham, NY 12037

ISBN 978-1-936367-73-3



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